The Naked Truth

Using Shameless Honesty to Enhance Your Confidence, Connections, and Integrity

By Daniel Munro

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Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are real, however names and some personal details have been edited to ensure privacy.

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This book is dedicated to

Christine "Bot" Talbot,

who can always be relied on

for unconditional love,

support and acceptance.

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Editor's Preface

Dan Munro's book, *The Naked Truth,* could be summarized in Dan's own words: "When in doubt, just be more honest".

Dan presents a compelling account of what it means to be honest, genuine, vulnerable, truthful, grateful and loving. In particular, he spells out how one can achieve all of these states of being, overcome the crippling fear of creating genuine connections, and give the gift of one's most vulnerable and creative self to the world.

In a rather insightful and skillful way, Dan leads us into a familiar and yet rather unknown terrain: the one that we, perhaps, never dared to question — the twilight of half-truths, immense fear of confrontations, and half-explored beliefs that we hold both about ourselves and others.

It was anything but boring to follow Dan on his journey of writing this book. With each reading I discovered something new. With each challenge and each debate a new insight, and a clearer way of presenting a given point, would emerge — leading to the book that you hold in your hands today: a multilayered kaleidoscope of meaning that has the potential to help you gain new insights and perspective each time you read it.

This last point speaks of Dan's character and genuine vulnerability: although we both always believed that "the author has the final word", Dan never rejected a criticism or an invitation to reconsider the way in which he presented a given point — and on many occasions he decided to find an even more accurate and vulnerable way of expressing his main insights — a quality found only in truly confident writers.

The book that you hold in your hands is a road map, a call to adventure that spells out in detail how to put into practice a simple, yet profound, principle: "When in doubt, just be more honest".

Vedrana Cetina
Editor

Foreword

In this book, *The Naked Truth*, Dan Munro does something that many books on authenticity actually fail to do. He speaks from the heart in his own voice and provides the reader with a living example of the sort of integrity he's advocating. In this respect, he reminded me of Andrew Salter, one of the pioneers of behaviour therapy, who basically invented assertiveness training in the 1940s. Munro's work on personal integrity feels like it's reinvigorating this tradition by combining an emphasis on authenticity and self-expression with a recognition of the need to clarify our core values and organize our lives around them.

Most of my career has been spent researching and writing about the relationship between Stoic philosophy and cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). Munro's book is a personal testimony to the value of adopting a similar outlook on life, where awareness of our core values (virtues) and a commitment to living in accord with them provides greater meaning and direction. The Stoic Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius famously wrote that we should "Waste no more time arguing about what a good man is and just be one." Munro provides a similar call to action by constantly reminding us to live authentically and be honest with ourselves.

As I read this book, I was reminded of the importance of what we traditionally call *the protreptic approach* in ancient philosophy: the exhortation to live wisely and authentically. It's one thing to describe what it means to live well but quite another to persuade others to leave their comfort zone, make the effort, and change their lives for good. Munro, in the pages of *The Naked Truth*, wants to inspire you to take that step by speaking to you of his own struggle and transformation.

Donald Robertson
Author of *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor: The Stoic Philosophy of Marcus Aurelius*

Welcome...

"As I have said, the first thing is to be honest with yourself. You can never have an impact on society if you have not changed yourself. Great peacemakers are all people of integrity, of honesty, but humility."

Nelson Mandela

The Classic Dilemma

"Yeah, drugs are a definite deal-breaker for me", she said. "I could never be in a relationship with a guy who did drugs, even if it was just in the past."

I gulped, and an uncomfortable, sickening warmth spread through my torso. Lucie had just confirmed that we had no future together, though she didn't yet know it.

We'd agreed to play a game that would allow us to get to know each other more deeply. Part of the reason for this game was to help us decide if we should continue our relationship, upgrading it from 'dating' to 'boyfriend and girlfriend'. It was an important choice to make, because we lived in different cities — different countries, even — so if we wanted to continue seeing each other it had better be worth it.

I was smitten with Lucie. We'd only been seeing each other for a few weeks, a long-distance relationship between two cities for most of that time, and yet I couldn't get enough of this girl. I was already feeling sure that this was something *special*, something unlike anything I had ever experienced before: a potential relationship where I could totally be myself and not have to worry about being judged or losing her. Hell, I'd farted in front of her on our very first night together, and she was still here, weeks' later, on a weekend trip away with me as if we were already a committed couple.

But now, suddenly, it was all turned on its head. This game had just raised a critical dilemma for me. Unwittingly, Lucie had just sealed our fate. Not only do I have an extensive history of recreational drug use, but at the time she disclosed this deal-breaker I was still smoking weed almost every day. I was caught in the classic dilemma that rules our lives: do I tell the truth, or do I lie to get what I want? In front of me was a clear choice. I could have integrity or I could get the girl... but I couldn't have both.

Honesty had gotten me this far. The very fact that our connection already had such depth and richness was because I had dedicated my life to being as honest as possible, *no matter the cost*. And now, finally, I'd reached the point where being honest was going to cost me the 'outcome' of keeping Lucie in my life. But I knew what I had to do. I had to have faith in my core values. They'd saved my life before, and I couldn't betray them now.

So, fully prepared to lose her, I took a deep breath, looked her in the eyes, and said, "Well actually, you might not like this but..." and then I told her *everything*.

That was in 2015. At the time of writing this, May 2020, Lucie and I have just celebrated our one-year wedding anniversary, and Lucie is carrying our first child. How is this possible? How could I tell Lucie, while holding nothing back and using no manipulation of any kind, a personal secret that *guaranteed* that she wouldn't want to be with me? How could this honesty bring us to where we are today, committed to each other for *life*?

We are going to answer these questions (and many more) in this book.

You're An Honest Person... Right?

If you're like most people, you generally think of yourself as 'an honest person'. Sure, you might not share every single thought that pops into your head, but you're certainly not a *liar*, right? And if there are times you withhold certain information, it's only because it's sensible and kind to do so, right? Overall, even if you

do *occasionally* allow the tiniest of white lies to slip between your lips, you're always doing so for a good reason, and therefore, at the end of the day, you're still a good person... *right?*

Yeah, right.

Whether you admit to being dishonest or you still live in denial, this book is going to challenge you. The image you've created of yourself as being a good and honest person may indeed be *shattered* by what we discuss in this book. I want to prepare you emotionally, first and foremost, before you start reading further: *this book may hurt your feelings*. It may offend you. It may trigger you to experience guilt, anger, regret and disappointment. You may hate me by the end of it, or you might even hate yourself for a while.

I'm not trying to put you off reading this, I just want to start with an honest disclaimer. Great change comes from great crises. If this book makes you feel comfortable and happy it won't help you at all. This book will need to break you out of your complacent, easy-going delusion, and wake you up so you can see the harmful false reality that you create whenever you start pretending, lying, and hiding the truth. You are less confident than you could be because you're less honest than you could be. I plan to prove this claim to you, and show you a practical solution to this problem.

I will walk alongside you from the beginning to the end. This book will begin by redefining how you view honesty, and therefore how you view yourself as a person. We will start with your core beliefs about truth, identity, and connection with others. This book is particularly aimed at 'people-pleasers' — those of us who prioritise making other people happy — but the concepts in this book apply to anyone who uses dishonesty to protect themselves from negative consequences. Whoever you *think* you are currently, prepare yourself to let that identity go.

We will discuss *how* to be more honest in a practical, realistic, way that gives you the best possible chance to grow your self-confidence, to connect meaningfully with people, and to start designing an authentic lifestyle that suits your unique character and traits. You'll be able to unburden yourself of inaccurate beliefs about how honesty is 'rude' or 'blunt', and instead begin to master the skill of

Powerful Honesty, a concept that I will explain through the five core principles of expressing yourself truthfully. These will ensure that you can express yourself in a way that benefits you while remaining honest. This will also help you understand why your honesty is often not received well by others (hint: you're doing it wrong).

Finally, we will slowly turn up the heat as we explore the most difficult confrontations and ruthless levels of honesty, the kind of truthfulness that only the bravest dare to attempt. I will show you how to overcome the fears you have about revealing your true beliefs, preferences, passions and boundaries, and how to ensure that no one can discourage, manipulate or abuse you ever again. You will learn how to remove all of your mental filters, so that you never need to think of the 'right way' to speak your mind, and can finally feel free to just be yourself all the time, no matter who is around.

Honesty saved my life.

That is no exaggeration. As you'll soon learn, I spent many years honing a dishonest performance, pretending to be someone I wasn't so that people would like and respect me. As I got older, it stopped working the way it was supposed to and I became ever more anxious and miserable. Things just got worse and worse, until one day — on a whim — I started experimenting with being more honest.

A new world opened up to me. I could finally see *the Matrix*. Things that used to be a mystery — connecting deeply with others, negotiating successfully, and building unbreakable self-confidence — were suddenly revealed to be relatively straightforward and practical recipes that anyone could follow. To this day, I have never found anything that serves people more powerfully than simply learning how to consistently be a little bit more truthful.

I have personally tested everything I describe in this book. I have also coached hundreds of others to do the same. I have discarded anything that works only for certain people, and anything that requires certain talents or skills. What I discuss in this book works for everyone I have shared it with, whether they're bold or anxious, extroverted or introverted, people-pleasers or bullies, naturally

social or on the autism spectrum. If you are willing to break the unwritten social rules you've been conditioned to follow, and are willing to be humble, this book will help you answer the most difficult questions a person can face.

Who am I?
What does it mean to be myself?
Why do I often feel like I'm not good enough?
Why is being honest so scary?
How can I speak my mind without hurting people?
What's the secret to connecting with others and creating a loving relationship?
How can I love myself?
Why am I here?

Let us begin our quest to find the answers to these questions...

PART 1:

Explore

The first part of this book is dedicated to exploring honesty, integrity and confidence. We will talk about beliefs and mindset first, and then practical actions. We will unpack what it means to 'people-please' and how this relates to dishonesty and low self-confidence. Think of this first part of the book as the set-up: a mental preparation to become more honest.

Choosing to Be Honest

"Integrity is doing the right thing when you don't have to — when no one else is looking or will ever know — when there will be no congratulations or recognition for having done so."

Charles Marshall

My Life Was a Lie

I spent the majority of my life living a complete fiction. Up until about the age of twenty-five, most of what went on inside of me was not accurately represented by my words or actions. I was hiding most of my beliefs, thoughts and emotions — especially if they were unpleasant, painful, or confrontational. I lied about who I was and what I had done. I worked jobs I didn't like just because I thought I had to, and because I was needy for money and security. I formed relationships with people I didn't even like, and I did so by pretending to be someone I wasn't. I had almost everyone, including myself, completely fooled.

Most of my behaviour was a strategically crafted performance. Not only that, my view of myself and what went on inside me — represented by the dialogue in my head — was also an ongoing lie; a story designed to reduce the constant guilt I felt about my manipulative social performance and the pain I felt about my ever-present loneliness. I called this performance, "being a Nice Guy." It was an identity that I became attached to. I would cling to it during uncomfortable social situations, like a shy child hiding behind his mother's skirt. It was through being 'nice' that I justified my constant bullshitting.

Would you be willing to lose *everyone* in your life just to maintain your integrity? I certainly wasn't, not even close. Not for most of my life, anyway. Essentially, from a very early age, nearly everything I did had

the underlying motive of gaining some form of approval from other people. I was so dominated by my neediness for approval, validation and acceptance that it permeated every decision I made, and every action I took. And yet, like a fish living in water, I couldn't see it. I was so blinded by neediness that I lacked all awareness of being needy.

Well, not *all* awareness...

Every time I pretended to be someone I wasn't, I felt *something*. Every time I prioritized someone else's needs over my own, there was bitterness in the background. Every time I missed an opportunity because I lacked the courage to take a risk, it would haunt me in my dreams. I noticed that I often had to justify my own actions to myself. In the sewers of my mind, sleuthing around like Pennywise the Clown, there was a lingering regret, a guilty reaction to how I was living.

Maybe you've been feeling it too.

The Voices in Your Head

Deep, deep down, somewhere in the basement of my subconscious, a voice was whispering to me in agony, questioning all of my constant deception. Unfortunately, for most of my life, that voice was drowned out by others. My fear of abandonment and rejection was much louder and more demanding, bullying the other voice into silence and hoarding the keys to my mental control room. It took decades for me to even realise that there was another voice in the background, pleading to be heard. And once I began to hear it, I was extremely uncomfortable with what it had to say.

Perhaps you're reading this book because, like me, the voice of your integrity is getting louder. You've tried the fake way of living for some time now, and it isn't going as well as it's supposed to, is it? The voice of integrity is pointing out that trying to make people like you doesn't increase the feelings of connection with them. It's telling you that seeking money and status isn't increasing your satisfaction with life. Perhaps it's telling you that trying to look like

you've got it all together is even more tiresome than just letting shit fall apart.

You will have already seen glimpses of your integrity, for sure. There were times where you were proud of yourself for standing up for what you believed in. There were times when you impressed yourself by courageously taking a risk. There were times you got a surprisingly positive response when boldly asking for what you really wanted. There might have even been a genuine connection or two in your life, in which you were not hiding your insecurities or using any strategic manipulation, and felt a complete absence of loneliness for once.

There have been signs along the way, as there were for me. Whispers from the voice of your integrity about the possibility of *another way to live*, a way which doesn't require a constant dishonest performance.

Honesty Hurts Like a Bitch!

Accepting responsibility for my integrity was the most difficult, yet ultimately the most rewarding decision I've ever made. When I finally dropped the excuses — the lies I used to tell myself — and faced the fact that no one has ever *forced* me to be dishonest and that it was always a choice, I was freed. Speaking my mind removed all my resentments and sense of unfairness. Allowing people to reject the real me, so that I could pursue genuine connections, improved the quality of my social life tenfold. Choosing to do what I wanted rather than what others told me I *should* want, eventually created a meaningful life that I would never think to trade with anyone else. And I want this for you as well.

But, I must warn you: *it's going to hurt.*

Make no mistake, you choose dishonesty because, in the short term, it hurts less. You avoid confrontations because it feels warm and cosy when everyone just gets along. You prioritise the needs of others over your own because you like to be seen as the self-

sacrificing hero. You deny the truth about why you repeat the same harmful patterns of behaviour — by blaming it on others — because you don't want the burden of responsibility and acceptance. I get it. It seems like a sound strategy, right?

Yet, this comfortable and familiar strategy comes at a *terrible* price. There is something that hurts a lot more than confrontations, embarrassment, failure and disapproval, and that is *regret*. Regret for a life not lived; for lack of integrity; for the absence of loving connections; for missed opportunities and adventure; for not having a meaningful impact on the world. You've been avoiding the pain of honesty without realising that you have traded your very soul for the temporary illusion of just a little comfort and ease. The longer you allow this to go on, the worse you will suffer.

Thankfully, it's never too late to break this pattern of behaviour and rediscover the honesty you once knew as a small child. The longer you've lived apart from it — the more dishonest you've been — the more it will hurt to switch over to honesty and integrity. You are going to have to completely let go of controlling that which is external to you. All Hell might break loose, and it's OK to be scared. I was too.

But it will not be *unbearable*, I promise you. You *will* be able to handle it because you will be in control of how far you take it at any given time. We will take it slowly at first, and gradually build up your tolerance to the initial pain of truthfulness. I will, metaphorically, hold your hand as we go. And, as you begin to experience the relief and rewards that come from honest living, your courage and stamina will increase too, until living honestly becomes relatively painless. I genuinely feel more comfortable being ruthlessly honest now than I have ever felt while performing for approval in the past. But this transition took time, and at first it hurt.

Preparing For The Journey

I have a simple goal: *to make it easier for you to have integrity.* We're going to explore your unique personal relationship with honesty,

and develop a way of living where you express yourself truthfully, nurture genuine connections with other people, pursue the career and lifestyle you genuinely want, and let go of inaccurate beliefs about the world. I want to show you the benefits of living more honestly than you currently do, and how to do it.

In the first book of this trilogy — *Nothing to Lose* — we explored what it means to *think* more accurately; to adjust your beliefs to be more focused on what is true, both about you and the external world (if you haven't read it that's OK, this book will still make sense). Now, in *The Naked Truth*, we'll look at transitioning thinking accurately into honest expression and action. It's about changing the way you *behave* in order to increase your integrity.

This book will have a huge emphasis on taking action. Reading is but a small part of the transformation — you must change your behaviour if you hope to truly benefit from the ideas in this book. At the end of almost every chapter, I will suggest possible actions for you to take. They are merely suggestions. I don't really care what you end up doing, as long as you do something different to what you usually do. Preferably, something more honest.

When you read this book, make an effort to stop after you finish each chapter to do something new with the insights and ideas that have come up for you during the reading. It doesn't need to be a massive, world-changing action, it only needs to be something that is courageously more honest than usual. Be more truthful in your expression, more passionate in your actions, or at least more accurate in your perceptions. I will give you guidance along the way in order to make this transition into action as simple and manageable as possible.

My transformation into a person of integrity came about through doing one tiny action at a time. While I certainly had some big moments — such as initiating intense confrontations or expressing attraction directly for the first time — the real gains came from *a daily momentum of slightly increased honesty over time*. You can avoid overwhelming yourself or slipping into a complacent information/thinking trap by doing what I did: focus on small actions that can be performed every day to gradually increase your integrity. Suggested actions in this book will never

be more than what you can handle, but they will push you to the limit.

I'm feeling excited as I write this. You might be about to embark on a journey that positively transforms reality as you know it. I am going to introduce you to the possibility of something amazing: a life where you get to truly be yourself — *all the time.*

What is Honesty?

"If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything"

Mark Twain

Honesty is...

Honesty is when your words and actions accurately reflect what you're currently believing, thinking, feeling and desiring. It's when what you express aligns with your inner experience, and what you do aligns with what you want to do or what you believe is the 'right' thing to do. Honesty is an expression of what you believe to be true. And, when you're not sure whether something is true, your expression will show your uncertainty and doubt. You'll clearly state the difference between opinion and fact. Your expression will show certainty when you believe what you're saying (or doing) is truthful, and uncertainty when you're open to being challenged or corrected.

I can be honest about what I believe is happening or has happened — a narrative about my thoughts, memories and emotions. I can also be honest about *why* I'm sharing these things — my intentions, motives, insecurities and desires. The more I show you, the more honest I am; the less I show you, the less honest I am, until eventually I'm not just hiding information, I'm deliberately allowing you to believe something I know not to be true. This is when honesty becomes dishonesty.

The Difference Between Honesty and Truthfulness

Honesty is often different to *accurate truthfulness*. Just because what you're expressing aligns with what you believe to be true doesn't

mean it's accurate or can be proven with evidence. I can honestly believe in something without that something being correct. Try not to confuse *honesty* (expression of belief) with *objective truth* (verifiable facts). Being honest is the first goal; becoming more truthful is the refinement of honesty.

For example, if I believe that the Earth is flat, I can say, "The Earth is flat", and I would be honest, but I wouldn't have been accurately truthful, because I'm stating a fact about Earth without evidence to support it. If I was instead to say something more like, "I *think* that the Earth is flat" then I'm being both honest and accurately truthful, because I'm now talking about *my belief* rather than the factual nature of the Earth. And, of course, if I was to say, "Based on what I've seen from scientific evidence, I've come to the conclusion that the Earth is a sphere," I'm being both accurately truthful and honest.

To keep this simple for now, bear in mind that honesty is when what you believe to be true aligns well with what you express. Being accurately truthful is the next level up: when being honest also happens to align well with valid and reliable evidence. In a deep philosophical sense, you could argue that reality is a mystery and that no one really knows *the objective truth*. However, you will always know what *you* believe to be true, so being honest does not require knowledge of an objective truth, it only requires awareness of what you believe.

And, obviously, when what you express does not align with what you believe, then you are lying. When what you express does align with what you believe, but does not align with accurate truth, then you're being honest but you're mistaken. As we'll explore later in this book, you will learn how to reconcile honesty with accurate truthfulness by speaking in a way that shows that, while you may believe in something with full certainty, you are simultaneously aware that you could be wrong. You will learn to talk about your inner experience powerfully (e.g. starting sentences with "I assume that..." or "I feel like..." or "My mind is telling me that..."), while never losing sight of the human tendency to be inaccurate.

"Just be Yourself"

All throughout our lives we are given what appears to be a clear and simple instruction: *just be yourself*. Those three words give us the impression that being true to yourself — i.e. having integrity, being unique, uninhibited, honest, and confident — is a straightforward and simple proposition. Real-life experience, of course, has taught us otherwise.

As we look around, we can clearly see that this 'just be yourself' message has not been understood or implemented in any helpful way. We can see clear evidence that many people have not yet figured out how to just be themselves, and as a result are suffering from existential crises. Anxiety disorders in the United States are rampant[1]; criminal behavior continues and is increasing in harmful impact in the United Kingdom[2]; worldwide obesity rates have tripled since 1975 and continue to rise[3]. These are all warning signs that many people are not satisfied with who they are, their way of living is simply not working well for them, and their coping mechanisms are harmful. It's not unreasonable to assume that someone who has figured out what it means to be themselves, and is content with who they are, would be unlikely to develop chronic anxiety disorders, commit harmful acts towards others in the form of a crime, or destroy their body through emotional eating.

Most people seem unable to clearly articulate what it means to be themselves, or even to express themselves honestly. Any online dating website or social media profile will show you how much the average person is willing to pretend and lie. The idea of being yourself in a measurable, tangible form remains a mystery to many. When you look closely at most people, you will see that they are needy, desperate striving to achieve status, impress people and win approval at all costs. Yet they'll pretend to have noble intentions. You'll see a lot of people pursuing goals relentlessly, without enjoying the process along the way. What you won't see much of is

1 https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics

2 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2018

3 https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight

shameless honesty: people showing their true opinions, feelings and intentions.

Just Fake It

We are also told to "fake it 'til you make it". We are told to dress sharp to impress others, and yet we're also told to stop caring what other people think. In school, we were taught to chase a secure job and steady paycheck, by teachers who often didn't even seem to enjoy their own steady job, and who never once asked us what we actually wanted to do. And worst of all, we are told to be insincere with others in order to build genuine lasting connections with them (e.g. politeness, professionalism, and seduction). The advice out there on what it means to be yourself is clearly contradictory and senseless — every rule you follow requires you to contradict another rule — and yet we mindlessly try to follow this path that others have set for us.

As a child, you were probably encouraged to be yourself and to express yourself honestly, yet at the same time you got punished whenever you actually followed this noble advice (if your behaviour was somehow inconvenient for others). When a child throws an embarrassing tantrum in the supermarket, the worn-out parents snap and yell at the kid to stop crying, even though the kid is just honestly expressing themselves. When a child speaks his or her mind, they are smacked on the bum for being rude. A child's natural impulse is to learn by curiously testing its surroundings and boundaries, which will inevitably get them into trouble. When they confess to these curiosity-crimes, they are punished. They quickly learn to lie to avoid this punishment. Lying is the survival tool of the pre-teen; the more punishment you receive in general as a child, the more likely you are to lie[4].

The movies, storybooks, and television programs you were exposed to in your youth constantly harped on about the concept of being yourself while giving you almost no practical guidance on how to implement this idea. The plotlines of these stories often paradoxically show the heroes using deception and manipulation

4 https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01663.x

to achieve their goals. Your teachers, parents and caregivers often recommended that you should not worry about what others think, yet if you were to do something that they find embarrassing, they would demand that you change your behaviour to suit them, i.e. you *should* care what they think.

In a nutshell, you have witnessed a lot of hypocrisy around the advice to 'just be yourself', and therefore you became confused about honesty as a concept. Take a moment to think about the confusing and contradicting messages you received as you grew up. While you were being advised to 'just be yourself,' you were also being pressured to:

- Be polite, even if it required lying;
- Not rock the boat, even if you disagreed strongly;
- Dress to impress, even if it felt fake or uncomfortable;
- Not say anything if you didn't have anything nice to say, and to be nice even if you didn't feel like it;
- Not be angry, sad, confused, scared, stressed, grumpy, bored, lonely, frustrated or guilty, even though these emotions regularly occurred without you being able to control them;
- Do as you're told without question, even if you think it's unethical or senseless;
- Respect people just because of age, social status and wealth, even if they're unkind to you;
- Follow your family's belief-systems, regardless of counter-evidence;
- Study subjects at school that you weren't interested in.

The list goes on and on and on.

It's a slightly confusing message, right? Well, perhaps the people raising you weren't totally clear themselves on what 'just be yourself' means. The authority figures in your life actively promoted dishonesty and deception, often insisting that you moderate or outright lie about your truth. Yet, you were still desperately trying to cling to the concept of 'just being yourself' because they pressured you to somehow also achieve this authentic state while simultaneously

being dishonest to suit them. Eventually, the pressure became too much, and you lost your grip on what being yourself meant. Now you probably have no fucking clue who you are. But it's all good, my brothers and sisters, because you *can* find it out again.

I'm not going to tell you what it means to be *you*. Why would I? I have no way of knowing what being 'yourself' means for you, as each of us are uniquely different. So instead, we will focus our attention toward helping you to express yourself honestly and learn how to engage in behaviour that aligns with *your* core values. We will explore how to actively live by your truth as accurately as possible. I invite you to let go of all that 'being yourself' stuff, and instead embrace the exploration of simply speaking and behaving more honestly. Who you really are will emerge from that. To get you ready for this shift, here is the definition of honesty that we'll be using in this book, to replace the vague advice of "just be yourself":

Honesty is expressing truthfully what you think, how you feel, and what you want to do, as soon as it occurs to you.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY:

- Very few people really know themselves, and most people are dishonestly performing to avoid painful consequences.
- You were taught to be dishonest by people who have repeatedly failed to live honestly themselves. You'll need to challenge everything you were taught about confidence and integrity.
- Let go of being 'yourself' and instead focus on expressing yourself honestly.

KEY ACTIONS:

- Reflect on the messages you've received as a child about just being yourself — and then write a list of all the contradictory messages you received as well (e.g. a teacher telling you to fit in with the rest of the class)

People-Pleasing

"You can tell the same lie a thousand times, but it doesn't get any more true."

Randy Blythe

People-Pleasing: Creating a Fake Social Reality

All the dishonesty that we use with the intent to promote social harmony — avoiding confrontations, controlling other peoples' emotions, pretending to be someone that's easy to like, and any action designed to protect ourselves socially — comes under the umbrella of 'people-pleasing'. People-pleasing covers any form of behaviour that is done with the primary motive of *making other people experience pleasurable emotions*, almost always with the secondary intention of those people then connecting that happy sensation with ourselves. In other words, people-pleasing is all about being the person who makes other people feel good (and is therefore likeable).

People-pleasing requires dishonesty, such as: doing extra hours at work to impress your boss while pretending it doesn't exhaust you; telling jokes to hide that you're feeling depressed; giving someone the impression that you're listening to them intently, when really you're off in your head planning for when it's your turn to speak. We tell ourselves that we engage in these forms of dishonesty to make people feel happy, and we try to persuade ourselves that giving happiness is a good reason to pretend. But if it requires dishonesty, what's really going on under the surface here?

I spent most of my life desperately trying to make other people feel happy. Up until my mid-twenties, I felt like there was simply no other way to live. The only alternative I could think of was to be

a selfish jerk (which I had no interest in being), so I felt like I'd been left with only one option. I tried to make this work for me as best I could, grinding through self-sacrifice like a samurai bearing the burden of service to his master. I gave all I had to give, and then I gave some more.

I'd pride myself on being 'nice', which meant consistently being attentive, compassionate, funny, entertaining, gentle, tolerant, respectful, easy-going, emotionally unaffected, and any other trait that had a high likelihood of making people feel comfortable. I saw 'being nice' as my *purpose*, my higher calling. I firmly believed that there was no more noble way to live. I looked down on people who weren't nice like me; all those pathetic losers with their anger, confusion, sadness, and disgust, and their self-centredness, selfishness, and apathy about the wellbeing of others. I placed myself high on a righteous pedestal above them all because I was 'good'. Every time I could make someone laugh, stop someone from crying, help someone complete a task, make someone feel better about themselves, or provide advice, I reconfirmed my belief that pleasing people was the best possible use of my time and energy, and that I was a good person for doing it… even if it meant being totally fake.

Nowadays, I look back on my past self with a sense of tragic empathy. How very, very wrong I was! There is *nothing* more selfish than people-pleasing. We convince ourselves that being nice is a sacrifice that primarily benefits others (therefore justifying any dishonesty along the way), yet this couldn't be further from the truth. Every action taken by a people-pleaser has a single purpose:

Controlling other people's emotions to make yourself *feel more comfortable.*

Underneath all the bullshit, altruistic fairy-tales we tell ourselves about making other people happy, there lies a toxic darkness. We are *using* people for our own validation; controlling them like puppets with our subtle and devious manipulation, and — worst of all — we stray miles away from honesty and integrity, where our self-confidence resides. We tell ourselves that we're 'good people', but if being nice requires so much deception, emotional manipulation, and selfishness, are we really all that good?

People-pleasers aren't evil, but we certainly aren't the heroes we like to think we are. In truth, we are *addicted to approval*. We are subconsciously driven by a warped belief-system that leads us to judge, manipulate and disable others, while feeding our own never-ending hunger for external validation. Unfortunately, this manipulative behaviour *increases* our sense of loneliness because it prevents us from creating honest connections with others, as we'll explore in detail over the next few chapters. Being controlling also lowers our self-worth because the dishonesty required to keep everyone under control increases our shame. Hiding who we truly are is what creates the "I'm not good enough" narrative in the first place. All the while, we keep convincing ourselves that we're 'good people', which encourages us to repeat this destructive behaviour. We continue to drink our own poison in a never-ending loop of pure madness.

If you're a people-pleaser, the next few chapters are going to be a bitter pill to swallow. I'm not kidding: a few beta-readers of the first draft of this book said that these upcoming chapters hurt their feelings. I invite you to read on anyway, for one reason only: *people-pleasing doesn't really work*. I'm right, aren't I? You've probably been bending over backwards your entire life to avoid conflict, make people happy, be what they want you to be, or be a good little boy or girl, yet the universe seems unimpressed, doesn't it? You're not getting the rewards you "deserve," and you're starting to wonder why the world punishes and deprives awesome people like yourself while heaping rewards onto all those selfish, mean-spirited, and narcissistic people out there. You know, all those people you're *so* much better than.

I'm going to challenge the core beliefs that you draw on to excuse your dishonesty, those which manifest in the form of people-pleasing, and your mind is probably going to react with strong resistance. I'm going to tear apart the excuses that you have been telling yourself to justify not living with integrity. And I'm going to do it with love, because I was once just like you and I have a pretty good idea of how it feels; but I'm not going to pull any punches. I needed a smack in the head to break through my addiction to approval, and I think you do, too. Hell, some of you reading this won't even realise that you are a people-pleaser… just wait; you'll see.

People-pleaser beliefs can be separated into two categories: internal and external. In the next few chapters, we'll address the bullshit beliefs you have about yourself, and then we'll dive into the bullshit beliefs you have about the external world and other people. Let's get into it. Remember, I warned you:

This might hurt your feelings...

People-Pleasing, Part 1: The Lies About Making Others Happy

"Self-development is a higher duty than self-sacrifice."

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Bullshit Belief #1: Others Benefit From My Self-Sacrifice

The foundation of the people-pleasing belief system is the idea that others can and do benefit from our *self-sacrifice*: the suffering we endure when we put the needs of others ahead of our own. Nearly every day we tell ourselves this story. We come to the conclusion that through our people-pleasing we are doing 'good' in the world because it *hurts* to do, therefore our actions are justified and our intentions must be pure (even if it means being dishonest). Ah, if only that were true. But it is not.

My original enthusiasm for self-sacrifice was challenged by a specific incident. I was on a plane, and the crew were carrying out the standard safety-briefing that I usually ignore. As they blathered on about laughably optimistic crash-survival positions, one particular line caught my attention. Although I had heard it many times before, this time — perhaps due to the self-development work I was engaged in — it hit home and created a new insight for me. The line I'm referring to is the bit about what to do when the oxygen masks descend for the passengers:

"Make sure to secure your own mask before *helping the child next to you."*

This time, for some reason, it really caught my attention. At first, I felt almost offended, even insulted, by the idea that someone would be so narcissistic that they'd take care of themselves before helping a poor defenceless and vulnerable child. How *dare* they demand that I act with such ruthless selfishness? That was my first reaction, and I was confused as to why this had bothered me so much. Why was I feeling so defensive? Why did I even notice them saying it?

So, for the first time ever, I attempted to understand the airline's reasoning behind giving this instruction to be selfish, and I was surprised to discover that it immediately made complete sense. If the cabin is deprived of oxygen we could suffocate, pass out, and eventually die. The suffocation part occurs almost immediately, so it's important to secure your oxygen mask as quickly as possible. Now, if someone sitting next to you were to pass out, you've still got a chance of saving them so long as you can still breathe.

And that's the point. If you are fucking around trying to get a mask onto a panicking child when you're not even breathing yourself, the mostly likely outcome is that you *both* pass out and die! Have you ever tried to get a pair of trousers onto a resistant child? That's a walk in the park compared to getting an oxygen mask onto a kid who's screaming, panicking and suffocating, in an upside-down plane filled with smoke and reeking of terror. You'd pass out trying to get their mask on because you're also suffocating, and then there's no one left to help either of you.

This oxygen mask dilemma is the most accurate analogy I can think of to describe the tragedy of people-pleasing.

We ignore our own need for oxygen, struggling in our suffocation while trying to be seen as a hero for saving others. In a semi-conscious way, we often do realize this is the case because we're always exhausted, stressed and procrastinating on our own self-care, and shaming ourselves with dishonesty, but we convince ourselves that this is noble; that we're 'helping' the other passengers in our lives. Many people-pleasers believe that helping other people must somehow hurt for it to qualify as being helpful, hence our love for self-sacrifice. And how this mostly manifests is through dishonesty — we sacrifice our need for expressing the truth and

releasing our honest thoughts and feelings (we suffocate ourselves) so that others don't have to feel uncomfortable.

Let's say you're moving into a new house. As a people-pleaser, I jump at the chance to be of service, and so I insist on helping in a self-sacrificial way. Deep down, I don't genuinely want to heave someone else's crap around on a warm Saturday morning and I don't really have the extra time or energy available, but I would consider myself 'selfish' if I didn't help. And *offering* to help isn't good enough, I actually *insist* on helping: I won't even let you say no! I'll be there to move house with you whether you want me to or not. I won't allow you to deny me the opportunity to get high on your approval and secure my good reputation... whoops! um, I mean to selflessly help you out of pure kindness, of course!

As a people-pleaser, I used to communicate my needs indirectly and assumed that this was how everyone communicated their desires, so if someone mentioned that they were moving house I would interpret that as them secretly asking for help. I was too scared to directly ask for what I wanted and so I thought everyone was, too. I would unwittingly put people under pressure to let me help them, even though *they never asked for it*. And of course, since I did this all the time, I was helping everyone in my life simultaneously, so I'd get totally burned out.

Although the people in my life could see clearly what was going on with me and wished that I would just take some time to chill out, I would never let anyone decline my help. Something like moving house would become a guilty experience for those people because they could see that the extra work was contributing to my suffering, but I wouldn't let them prevent my suffering. I was exhausted from asking for extra work, and yet I would subconsciously resent people for adding to my workload. Finally, after the tasks were completed, I would then get upset with people for not showing enough appreciation and recognition. All the while, the people in my life felt guilty, pressured, and obligated to return the favour. I suffocated them while suffocating myself.

Who wins in these situations? Who benefits? No one. People-pleasing is like a panicky passenger trying to force a mask on you when the plane isn't even going to crash. It's invasive, unhelpful, and

ultimately leads to everyone's suffering. Sure, sometimes people *are* indirectly asking for help, and they often do get an easier life from your assistance in the short term, but does that mean you should *enable* them? Most of the time, all you will end up doing is feeding their dependency on others. You will prevent them from figuring shit out for themselves, or at the very least learning to be direct about what they want.

Another great example happened to me recently. I was at a gardening store, buying some weed-killer and tools. It was a great opportunity for me to practice my new Czech language skills, and I had psyched up myself for the attempt. Trying my best, I asked for assistance and described what I wanted. One of the store clerks picked up on my struggle, and then *automatically switched to English*! I know that she was trying to be helpful, but her people-pleasing behaviour deprived me of the opportunity to develop my Czech skills. No matter how many times I insisted on speaking Czech, she insisted on responding in English. She had no real interest in figuring out what I actually needed, she was just obsessed with making me more comfortable, and in doing so she removed my ability to grow.

Self-sacrifice also commonly leads to another ironic situation, one that significantly puts into question your people-pleaser belief that others benefit from you sacrificing yourself: *the problem of hurting those we love the most*. Many people-pleasers treat total strangers better than their own family members and friends because they only feel safe to release their frustrations (from sacrificing themselves) around people with whom they feel safe, i.e. people who won't abandon them.

Let's look at Carrie[5], a former client of mine, as an example:

Carrie was the perfect employee, with strong, people-pleasing compulsions and dishonesty patterns. She would bend over backwards to support her boss and teammates. It got to the point where even if she was overloaded with extra work she'd still be unable to say "no" to more. She felt like she was being taken advantage of, and she'd beat herself up for allowing this bullying

5 Named changed for privacy

behaviour from her colleagues, yet she'd simultaneously encourage and enable it. She consoled herself with the idea that she was, at least, a 'Good Person'.

This Good Person was nowhere to be seen, however, once Carrie got home from work. The rules would change instantly. The moment she was through the front door, Carrie would become grumpy, unpredictable, easily provoked to anger, and domineering. Her husband and daughter lived in constant fear of her demands and outrageous mood swings. This model-employee people-pleaser would transform herself into the tyrant at home. She was a real-life Jekyll and Hyde.

Carrie hated herself for this, but felt powerless to prevent it from happening. All the resentment she built up during the day, from hurting herself to help others, would come pouring out around the ones she loved, even though she knew in her heart that they'd done nothing to deserve such treatment and were the ones she least wanted to hurt. All her outrage was only directed at them because she knew (subconsciously) that they would not abandon her. They were paying the price for her workplace people-pleasing, simply because they were loving and loyal!

As we worked together, Carrie came to realize that neither the Good Person people-pleaser nor the domineering Tyrant were true representations of herself, of her values and authentic desires. This whole identity battle was a diseased loop, where the Good Person and the Tyrant were reactive symptoms of each other: the people-pleasing was to avoid losing love at work, and the tyranny was a stress-reaction to the pressure and self-loathing that came from the dishonesty and people-pleasing behaviour. This cycle created a crippling fear of losing love, a poisonous paranoia that had nothing at all to do with her true values of kindness, courage and respect. Simply put, her Good Person identity prevented her from being accurately honest, so she just ended up swinging from one fictional identity to another.

Carrie's case accurately represents many people-pleasers in that, often, they're nicer to complete strangers than they are to the people they love the most; yet, they'll tell you that their loved ones are top priority (i.e. they lie to themselves and others

about their true behaviour). If Carrie genuinely wanted to please people, it should have continued within her home life without a single deviation, and her family and everyone else would have received the same treatment. There'd be no build-up of anger and resentment, no self-loathing or doubt, just a joy at being herself. Her secret mood-swings, cruelty, and self-hatred *proved* that the behaviour she engaged in with strangers and work colleagues was fake, and this fakeness placed a psychological burden on her that was bound to burst out as soon as she felt that she was safe to release the beast.

Nobody wins from this dishonest approach.

SOLUTION:

Would you like to help people? Great! Do them a favour: ensure that the help they receive from you is genuine, beneficial, and of high quality. How do you ensure this? Make sure you always: a) take care of your own needs first, b) be honest — check in with yourself to make sure that you are genuinely interested in doing the work, and c) ask permission to help, never forcing it on anybody.

If I want to help you move house, first I need to make sure you actually want my help, and that I'm in a willing and healthy state to offer you my help. Then, I need to say "no" to all the other people I had offered to help, so that I can create space for you, and I also need to make some time for myself to relax and rest, both before and after the move. That's what a *truly* generous and confident person would do. Self-sacrifice is just a needy, approval-seeking behaviour, nothing more. You must respect yourself before helping others.

Bullshit Belief #2: It's Good to Make Other People 'Happy'

We tend to categorise emotions as being either positive or negative, without much nuance. People-pleasers believe you should always feel 'good', which usually means: happy, calm, excited (but

not too excited), sociable, satisfied, entertained, easy-going, or other physically *pleasurable* sensations, particularly emotions that make *others* feel comfortable. Otherwise, you will suffer the pain and shame of feeling 'bad', which usually includes: anger, sadness, confusion, depression, fear, boredom, embarrassment, tiredness, anxiety, frustration, stress, awkwardness, or just feeling a bit anti-social. People-pleasers are massively judgmental about emotions, and about the people experiencing those emotions, though we often won't admit it, not even to ourselves. And of course, when it comes to being seen as 'weak' for experiencing the bad emotions, we reserve the harshest judgment for ourselves.

We people-pleasers figure that it is our job — nay, our duty! — to steer ourselves and those around us toward the good range of emotions, at any cost necessary. It doesn't matter if we must be fake, manipulative, or even cruel to make it happen, so long as everyone ends up feeling good. A people-pleaser is unable to just stand by and *allow* someone to be upset, bored, or miserable. Our judgmental nature kicks into overdrive and we end up 'herding' that person like a sheep, back into the happiness pen. And when *we* are the ones feeling down, we will berate, punish and pressure ourselves into a false expression of happiness, keeping a fake smile plastered on our face... until we eventually crash into a crippling depression or chronic anxiety.

In my people-pleasing days, to 'make people happy' I used humour, rational arguments, and distraction. If someone was feeling down or bored, my secret weapon was to make them laugh (in my mind I called this "cheering them up" so that it didn't feel manipulative). I could make people laugh at almost any time, I just knew which buttons to push. But if I couldn't make them laugh, my back-up plan was to *convince* them to be happy. I would argue, give advice, and generally force-feed them my perspectives and philosophy until I was able to change their outlook back to a happy one. And, finally, if none of that worked, I distracted them. I used gossip, diversions, entertaining stories and activity changes to keep their mind off whatever bothered them.

People-pleasers need to ask themselves a few key questions here. I want you to take the time to consider the answers to these carefully:

Why do you believe that emotions should be categorized as good and bad, rather than just as normal human emotions?

Who gave you the authority to decide what emotions others are (or are not) allowed to experience?

Why do you feel obliged to control the way other people feel?

Why do you automatically assume that pain is bad?

What do you gain from punishing and suppressing yourself when experiencing the 'bad' emotions?

As I discussed in detail in the first book of this trilogy — *Nothing to Lose* — all emotions have a helpful role to play in our lives, and they must all be felt in order to create overall psychological wellbeing and integrity. You can't grieve for your loss without the ache of sadness. You can't identify and stand up for what you believe in without the power of anger. You can't seek new answers and learn without first being willing to experience the sensation of being lost (what we call confusion). All of our emotions are *necessary* to create a rich and meaningful life, and even if they aren't, experiencing them is inevitable, so we'd better figure out how to get used to them! So, when you 'cheer someone up' or otherwise manipulate them into experiencing an emotion that *you're* more comfortable with, you cause them to miss out on any benefits the other emotions offer.

Wouldn't it be weird to be cheerful at a funeral? Or in a court case, where you're being sentenced to imprisonment? Or when you catch your lover cheating on you with your best friend? There is clearly some room for unhappy emotions. Emotions are there to enable us to process the struggles of life in a healthy way. And these examples are just the extreme exceptions. If you're not allowing yourself to regularly experience the full range of emotions, you're not really *living*. People-pleasers know they're not truly living — they can *feel* it — but they misguidedly conclude that this is due to not experiencing enough happiness. The truth is, happiness is probably the only emotion of which you don't need to be seeking more.

People-pleasing behaviour leads to becoming emotionally repressed, and you'll eventually snap under the pressure. Sometimes it leads to bingeing on alcohol, drugs, sugar or television. Sometimes it leads

to depression, complete loss of motivation, or mental exhaustion. Sometimes it leads to rage-tantrums or emotional 'pukes' (exploding unreasonably and irrationally over small grievances). Sometimes it leads to self-harm, or, in extreme cases, suicide. I've even come to believe that certain medical conditions, like migraines, strokes and heart attacks, can be caused by a lifetime spent in being dishonest to make others happy. One way or another, all this dishonest shaming of normal human emotions, and our pointless attempts to control and prevent these inevitable sensations, leads to an emotional *apocalypse*. You'll know this because you've already experienced it.

SOLUTION:

Just let emotions happen and express them truthfully. If you feel sad, just be sad. The same goes for anger, confusion, anxiety, and whatever else you're uncomfortable feeling and expressing. This doesn't mean that you should lash out or engage in harmful behaviour (we'll cover how to express yourself powerfully and accurately in later chapters). It just means not trying to make the emotions *end*, and not trying to speed up their cycle. Journal, go for a walk, talk to a friend — whatever helpful outlet you can find. And, just as importantly, allow others to feel their emotions, too. You can be there for them as they vent and express their feelings, but let it happen without trying to 'fix' them (by making them happy). Imagine that, somehow, this painful emotion will help them in the long run.

Bullshit Belief #3: The Only Other Option is To Be An Asshole

At some point in time, almost every people-pleaser considers doing a total 180 degree turnaround. I call it the 'pendulum swing', whereby a person goes from one extreme end of a spectrum to the other. In the people-pleasing world, this means going from nice to nasty; from selfless to selfish; from being a people-pleaser to being an asshole.

I know, it's *super* tempting at times, particularly when you see selfishness paying out dividends for others. There's always that one guy, isn't there? That guy who is a complete dick and life just seems to pile reward after reward onto him, completely undeserved. So, at some point, during those introspective times where you finally start to question being constantly nice, you consider going over to the dark-side: the only alternative you can see.

As a people-pleaser, I was highly compartmentalized and judgmental about people. In my eyes, you were either good or bad, nice or asshole, providing value or taking it away. There was no middle-ground, just various degrees of these two extremes. It is no wonder that I worked under the assumption that the only alternative to being nice was to be a complete prick. And it enraged me that those whom I categorized as 'bad' got everything I secretly coveted. It was so unfair!

Do you ever feel this way?

Some people-pleasers choose to experiment with engaging in the other extreme. I know I did. One day, around the age of twenty-four, I'd just had enough of being nice and decided to experiment with being an asshole. I was learning Pick Up[6] at the time and had become disillusioned with the constant 'friend-zoning'[7], which seemed to happen whenever I was 'nice' to girls (I couldn't see that hiding my attraction may have had something to do with it). I was bitter and resentful and looking for vengeance. So I started treating girls like shit, just to see what would happen. Unfortunately, it kind of worked.

But an awful turning point occurred one night, when I met a girl at my local pub, and all I did was take the piss out of her the entire night. I teased, offended, and disagreed with her about everything... and she came back to my house with almost no resistance at all, just like all the girls I'd ever seen in my life falling hard for the 'bad boys'. But surprisingly, by the time we got to my bedroom, I was sick with guilt. This asshole character I was playing in no way whatsoever

6 Pick Up, or PUA, describes a range of advice and teaching on how to attract and seduce women, usually with deceptive and manipulative techniques designed to 'hack' female psychology.

7 'Friend-zoning' is when someone you're attracted to only wants a platonic connection.

accurately represented my beliefs or values, and I knew it. I didn't like the act I was portraying. This 'me' that I was acting out was not a guy I was proud to be. She was about to have sex with a fiction that I had constructed out of resentment and neediness. So, I told her I didn't want sex and I slept on the floor. Really!

After this experiment, I felt tragically lost. Being nice didn't work, but now I knew I couldn't bring myself to be nasty either. I had tried both options and neither made my life any better. As Dr. Robert Glover says: "The opposite of crazy is still crazy." I thought I was doomed to a lifetime of people-pleasing because it was simply the lesser of two dishonest evils.

A few months later, while experimenting with courage-building techniques, I boldly expressed attraction directly and honestly to a random girl at a shopping mall. Her reaction blew my mind to pieces: she smiled like the sun bursting through rain clouds, and profusely thanked me for it. A paradigm shift struck me with the force of a bullet train. I had been bold, genuine, direct, sexually honest… and yet *still nice*! It had never before occurred to me that these different traits could co-exist, because until that moment they had belonged exclusively to either the Nice Guy or the Asshole.

This was the first time I had really swung for the fence and let a girl see my true feelings and intentions right from the start. I was doing the one thing that neither nice or nasty guys *ever* did: I was being *vulnerably honest*. Somehow, I had taken the best from both worlds and discarded the unhelpful bits. I wasn't trying to people-please, but neither was I being a prick. I was something else entirely — a powerfully honest and compassionate man — that until then I didn't realise was possible.

SOLUTION:

Yes, the opposite to being a people-pleaser is to be an asshole, but those aren't your only two options. They are the opposite ends of a manipulative spectrum that you don't need to be on, one founded on neuroticism, spite, insecurity, neediness, and dishonesty. The integrity spectrum, on the other hand, has neither of these extremes. Honesty is not synonymous with being an aggressive or dominating

asshole, and people-pleasing is definitely not the same thing as being kind, generous and compassionate. You don't have to swing like a pendulum between false niceness and nasty manipulation. You need to get off that unhealthy spectrum altogether, and create a new approach: something honest and representative of your core values.

Be honest about your intentions. Reveal your weaknesses. Be compassionate. But also stand up for yourself. Do not enable or allow harmful behaviour. Allow your thoughts and beliefs to manifest accurately in your behaviour while maintaining respectful boundaries. Neither people-pleasers nor assholes do all of these things.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- People-pleasing is any behaviour that's designed to strategically manipulate someone into feeling an emotion that you think of as pleasurable. It requires dishonesty and hiding your true intention of getting them to think positively of you.
- The first lie is that *other people benefit from you sacrificing yourself for them*. The truth is that you impose your help on them and use 'self-sacrifice' as a dishonest technique to control their feelings for you; for your own gain, not theirs.
- The second lie is that *it's 'good' to make people happy*. Acting on this belief deprives them of helpful emotions, and is secretly just a way for you to avoid having to experience uncomfortable emotions yourself. It's not really about helping them.
- And the third lie is that *you're stuck being a people-pleaser* because the 'only' other, more honest option is to be nasty or mean. The truth is, there's a third option, which is to be someone who is bold, honest and non-manipulative: you can still be nice but only when you truly mean it and when you reveal why you're doing it.

KEY ACTIONS

- Find one thing in your life that you do solely to benefit other people (like working more hours than your work contract demands of you) and stop that behaviour immediately. Don't justify it or ask for forgiveness, just stop.
- Spend a week just letting people feel whatever they feel. You can support them, but do not do anything to *change* the way they feel.
- The next time you do something nice for someone, tell them why you're *really* doing it (e.g. because you want to have a good reputation).

People-Pleasing, Part 2: The Lies About Yourself

"Above all, don't lie to yourself. The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to a point that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others. And having no respect he ceases to love."

Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Bullshit Belief #4: This is Who I Genuinely Am

Paradoxically, people-pleasers often convince themselves that they are being genuine. While we can clearly observe ourselves hiding our real thoughts, pretending to be happy, pretending to want to help, and even outright lying, we will contradict this evidence by claiming, "This is just who I am." We lock ourselves into a fixed identity despite being simultaneously aware of how false we often are.

Christian Jarrett, a cognitive neuroscientist and senior editor at Aeon, wrote an article discussing a problem actors face about getting lost in their roles[8]. He observed that many top actors, particularly 'method actors' (who take on the persona of their character even outside of filming and stage), can start to exhibit the traits and personality of the character, and essentially lose sight of who they really are. This is what happened to me. I spent so much time in the Nice Guy role that I eventually came to believe it was my genuine personality, somehow losing sight of the fact that I'd deliberately put effort into creating this performance and constructing this persona. I literally forgot that I was *acting*.

8 https://aeon.co/ideas/acting-changes-the-brain-its-how-actors-get-lost-in-a-role

The belief that you're carefully constructing, (i.e. dishonest acting as your true self), becomes a prison sentence. When you say, "This is who I am" about being a people-pleaser, you *make* it true and trap yourself. When you say that you are a People Pleaser, or a Nice Guy, or a Self-Sacrificing Hero, you create an identity that you feel obliged to maintain — a set of rules that you *force* yourself to follow, even when your gut instinct tells you that something is not right about this. In a sense, it *is* who you are — not because that's your authentic nature or truthful expression, but because *you've repeatedly conditioned yourself to be this way*. You've brainwashed yourself.

When you see undeniable proof that people-pleasing isn't getting you what you want out of life, you get scared. You've invested a lot of lies, time, effort, emotional energy, attention, and even money into pleasing other people. It's called *the sunk-cost fallacy*; you believe something has value simply because you've invested in it[9]. You've put a lot of effort into people-pleasing so now you're expecting a pay-out — you think you're owed big rewards for all you've invested so far. But just because you throw down a lot of cash at the craps table doesn't mean you are more likely to win a roll than anyone else.

There's another bias process happening simultaneously: the *intermittent reward system*. Your brain is wired to get more excited by occasional, unexpected wins than by consistent rewards[10] (which we inevitably take for granted). This bias is also backed by a skewed emotional memory known as *the heuristic availability*, where you remember times that were emotionally stimulating easier than you remember the dull periods where nothing happened[11]. So you end up anticipating a surprise 'win' through people-pleasing because it occasionally seemed to work in the past. Like the miserable drunk at a Vegas slot-machine, you cling to those rare past wins, and you're unwilling to walk away in case you miss the next jackpot. Deep down, you may suspect you've been investing poorly and

9 Friedman, D., Pommerenke, K., Lukose, R. et al. Searching for the sunk cost fallacy. Exp Econ 10, 79–104 (2007).

10 Hilgard, E. R. (1962). Motivation in learning theory. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science. Study II: Empirical substructure and relations with other sciences. Vol. 5. The process areas, the person, and some applied fields: Their place in psychology and in science* (p. 253–283). McGraw-Hill.

11 Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast And Slow*. New York : Farrar, Straus And Giroux (2011).

that people-pleasing has brought you more suffering than joy, but you resist acknowledging this possibility because it would be embarrassing to accept that you've wasted most of your social life.

Many of my coaching clients are terrified of giving up their people-pleaser identity. They wear it like a weird badge of honour, commemorating the wounds they received from self-sacrifice. Letting go of their identity is almost always a key piece of reframing work I must take them through to help them achieve truly flexible and confident integrity. They describe the fear of losing their identity in a similar way that people describe their fear of death: a complete unknown — a loss of self they see as dramatic, epic, and immensely painful. In most cases, my clients stubbornly cling to identities that they *know* are measurably harmful — like being Mr Nice Guy, or even being a Loser — because they subconsciously prefer that identity to being 'nothing', or to the struggle associated with creating something new and unfamiliar.

At any given snapshot in time, you are a unique, in-the-moment collection of beliefs, thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and even context. Who 'you' are is never static. It changes and fluctuates constantly, based on all sorts of factors, particularly the present external circumstances. Yes, you might be more likely to engage in people-pleasing behaviours in certain contexts, like in the presence of your boss or someone you're attracted to, but people-pleasing behaviours are always slightly different actions each time, and they never last longer than the context calls for it. Are you still a people-pleaser when you're on the toilet? Or making breakfast? Or writing in your journal? If you're not a people-pleaser every second of every day, then how can you honestly say, "This is who I am"?

The real issue with "This is who I am" is the implication that your behaviour is a true representation of your inner-self, therefore, you think that it essentially qualifies as 'honest' behaviour. You play a subtle mind-trick, where you say "If who I am includes lying, then lying is honestly part of who I am, and therefore lying is actually honest." You've convinced yourself that your behaviors have authentic intentions and accurately represent your core beliefs and values. This couldn't be further from the truth. Sure, sometimes your people-pleasing is aligned with your values (e.g. you genuinely

want to help people), but this is usually a lucky coincidence rather than an intentioned effort. Much of the time, your people-pleasing behaviours are a form of lying: you wouldn't do it if you weren't afraid of social rejection, ostracism or embarrassment.

Some people-pleasers — perhaps even you — are very consistent with their self-sacrificing behaviour, and therefore more likely to believe it's genuine, but there will still be some warning signs that you're not living honestly or with integrity. *Exhaustion* is a key one. The effort of trying to keep everyone happy, driven by a toxic desire to get approval and to repress 'negative' emotions, takes its toll over time. If you find yourself often feeling anxious, tired, depressed, confused, and fantasizing about change or escape, ask yourself: "If I am really expressing myself honestly and being true to myself, then why do I feel this way? Is it possible that I'm lying to myself about how genuine I am, and *that's* why I'm worn out?"

You are not really a people-pleaser! This is not who you *truly* are. These behaviours are not true to your core beliefs, even if you've consistently behaved this way for a long time. I was a consistent Nice Guy for *decades*, yet it was never truly me; it was always a manipulative, dishonest performance. People-pleasing behaviours are simply outdated childhood coping-mechanisms that you've continued with because you haven't let go of your investment in them and the identity that justifies them. Perhaps they worked well for you in the past — preventing schoolyard bullying or keeping an unstable parent calm — but they were never an expression of who you truly are. You just hold onto that belief to avoid the guilty feeling of recognizing that you disrespect yourself or your loved ones. I know this, because I believed and behaved like this for most of my life, too.

SOLUTION:

This is mostly about self-awareness. Notice how you're different around different people. Notice how you take off your mask and put an end to the performance once you're home alone, or around close friends that you trust completely. Notice how much effort you put into performing around the people with whom you feel unsafe. Notice how painful self-sacrifice is; how it feels like self-harm.

Integrity is almost entirely effortless. It's more about *being* than doing. So, if you're exhausted, stressed, hypersensitive, anxious, or have any other symptoms of trying too hard, then people-pleasing and being dishonest is not really you.

Bullshit Belief #5: I'm Basically An Honest Person

It's difficult to simultaneously believe that you are both a good person and a dishonest person. Lying doesn't align comfortably with the people-pleasing identity — 'good people' don't lie, right? So, what does the mind do? It lies to itself about the lying! It's the only option you've got, because you're much more invested in being 'a good person' than you are in being honest.

People-pleasers that I know personally have claimed on many, many occasions that they see themselves as "basically honest". While they might begrudgingly acknowledge that they don't share *every* important opinion or desire that comes into their mind, they claim to feel satisfied with the level of honesty they bring into the world, and they are content to stand by their belief that they are living with integrity. They explain that what they *do* express is truthful, and that there's no deliberate deception. There's a kind of ends-justify-the-means perspective, whereby they convince themselves that because they are doing 'good' things and being a good person, whatever they are doing to achieve this must therefore essentially qualify as 'good', and thus also 'honest'.

It's all a big, juicy, steaming pile of *bullshit*.

When it came to changing my people-pleasing behaviours into confidence and genuine kindness, the biggest barrier I had to face was the sheer *quantity* of my dishonesty. I wasn't just occasionally lying or hiding some truths, I was in fact *living a lie*. This is what made it so hard to become self-aware: I couldn't see the forest for the trees. I wasn't trying to con people with deliberate lies — well, at least I managed to convince myself that I wasn't — and because

of this, I considered myself to be an honest person. When I finally found the courage to shine a light on my behaviour, what I saw shocked me to the core. I'm going to share some of my revelations now. Maybe you'll see yourself in some of these, too.

I noticed that I *exaggerated stories* to make them more interesting, funnier, or relatable to the audience. I edited story content to ensure I'd keep the listener's attention, like adding a few fictional sexy girls when telling a tale to a drunken single guy. I would also carefully choose the stories based on the audience's preferences (often without consciously realising I was selecting in this way) to win as many social points as possible. The stories were strategically crafted, a far cry from spontaneous expression. If I was around intelligent people: my stories were analytical, witty and rational. If I was around girls I was attracted to: they were funny stories that highlighted my kindness and the unfairness of the Universe toward me (for some bizarre reason I thought self-deprecation was attractive). Most of the stories were at least partially based on truth, yet few, if any, were a completely accurate account of the events. And without exception, any dark emotions I had experienced, such as anger, stress, embarrassment or confusion, were highly misrepresented when it came to telling others about it later on.

I also *pretended to agree* with whomever I wanted to like me, or anyone I was afraid would react badly to disagreement. I wanted to make people feel special through my agreement. I wanted to give them feelings of satisfaction, acceptance and connection. I wanted to make sure they wouldn't cry, feel embarrassed, shout at me, or become violent. As a teen, I was particularly afraid of violence. I could disagree with people I felt safe around, especially if I knew there were others who agreed with me, but if I felt like no one had my back then I would withdraw. I was happy to argue about superficial facts and high-level concepts, but I would almost never directly challenge someone on their beliefs, feelings, or treatment of others if my truthful opinion was clearly oppositional to their views. I was too scared that I'd end up either crying or getting punched in the face.

I *hid how I truly felt* whenever I started to experience emotions I was uncomfortable with or thought that others would be uncomfortable

with. I would immediately withdraw into an internal process of trying to deconstruct, compartmentalize, and discredit the emotions. This was particularly true around emotions like fear, sadness, anxiety, anger, stress, confusion, and even excitement. I would tell myself it's 'wrong' to feel that way, convince myself that I don't *really* feel that way, and internally beat myself into submission until I regained a kind of passive, placid apathy, all the while pretending to feel cool and collected.

All these examples are forms of *lying*.

Whenever you allow someone to believe something that is not true about you, based on how you expressed yourself, you are lying. Whenever you hide important information that you know is relevant to how a person sees you, you are lying. 'White lies,' withholding opinions to protect someone's feelings, and keeping secrets about yourself are all lies. Now, are you *still* so sure you're an honest person? And if not, then how can you claim to also be a 'good' person?

SOLUTION:

You can tell yourself that you're a good person if you really want to, but stop telling yourself that you're also an honest person. You lie — we all do — and until you face this fact, your self-deception will trap you in the prison of people-pleasing. Start revealing these deceptions when you see them take place. Become more honest with yourself and create a more accurate picture of who you really are, so that you at least have a shot at living with integrity, rather than living in a cave of denial and ignorance.

One time at a party, I was telling a hilarious story about an experience I had with my father. I'd been keeping my friends in stitches for a good fifteen minutes with this story, when suddenly I realized I was lying! The whole story was basically a Frankenstein-composition of some truthful events mixed with some completely fictional details. I'd even thrown in parts from other peoples' stories and stuff I'd seen on television. I was so shocked by the insight that I just stopped talking. Once the group started curiously raising their eyebrows, I spontaneously admitted that the whole story was made

up. This only served to make them laugh even harder, of course, but more importantly, I felt a weight lifted off my shoulders. Finally, I could see my lies and find the courage to reveal them, without losing friends in the process. I caught myself lying *to myself* and others, and was able to let go of it without further investment.

Bullshit Belief #6: I'm Non-Judgmental

Part of the people-pleasing 'good person' identity is viewing yourself as a fair, open-minded, and compassionately non-judgmental person. I once conducted an online survey for one hundred people-pleasers[12], and they nearly all claimed to be non-judgmental. While we might admit that we're probably a bit hard on *ourselves*, we still tend to believe that our view of others is rational, accurate, fair, and kind-hearted. When we think negatively about someone, we believe that we're simply observing facts. At least, that's how I viewed myself during my people-pleasing days, and many of my clients also find it difficult to acknowledge the possibility that they're unfairly judgmental and inaccurate about other people.

Without exception, I've observed that people who are hard on themselves are equally judgmental about others, and vice versa. You may not always have *coherent* judgmental thoughts, but it's implied by the way you view yourself. If you see yourself as *better* or *worse* than others, in any way, then you are being judgmental. You cannot be 'good' compared to others without them being 'bad' as a counterbalance. If you saw everyone as equally good then there could be no concept of good; good would just be normal. If you see yourself as generous, that means you must judge others as stingy. If you see yourself as helpful, then you must judge others as unhelpful. These subjective assessments about others are based only on how you see yourself — which means there's no valid evidence supporting your views. It's a comparison based on assumptions. This is judgmental! And because it's so inaccurate, being judgmental is another form of dishonesty.

12 https://soundcloud.com/thebrojo/what-100-people-pleasers-say-they-have-in-common

When you get past your people-pleaser identity-supporting bullshit, you'll see that you've often been extremely judgmental and, in fact, quite unfair and vicious in your views of others. But of course, this doesn't line up with how you want to see yourself — *a good person isn't judgmental* — so you deliberately and subconsciously avoid acknowledging what you truly think about others (and yourself). But don't worry, we all do this! That's one of the reasons why I wrote this book — it's something we all have in common.

The most common forms of judgment disguised as classic 'nice' behaviour is *giving advice* and *helping without being asked*. I invite you now to explore how judgmental and dishonestly inaccurate this kind of behaviour really is.

Let's start with the tendency of people-pleasers to give advice. People-pleasers are notorious for giving *unsolicited* advice, and will pat themselves on the back when they do so, convincing themselves of how helpful they are. In theory, giving advice seems to be a helpful, altruistic act, but is it really?

Firstly, you probably weren't asked for it, which means you've judged someone as 'needing' your advice. You've decided they're too feeble-minded to solve issues without a hero like you to save them. This is likely to be based more on assumptions than evidence: how many dilemmas have they survived so far in their life without your help? Maybe they're a lot more capable than you are willing to give them credit for.

Secondly, even if you *were* asked, people do not grow from being told what to do. They will make greater progress from figuring things out for themselves, so you've possibly deprived them of this opportunity by giving them advice (you've either assumed they'd never find the answer themselves, or you're unwilling to let them steal your glory as the problem-solver). You lie to yourself by saying that your help is what's *best* for them.

Thirdly, if you give advice with complete certainty, you're probably assuming that *your* way of thinking is the best or only way, which means if you're wrong — and science shows us clearly that there's always a better solution to what we know currently — then you're selfishly leading them down an unhelpful path, just so you can

stroke your own ego. Is that 'nice'? Are you really so arrogant to believe that your way is what's best for another person? Do you even consistently follow your way yourself, or are you a hypocrite?

Helping people in other ways is often also highly judgmental. The same principles apply: we often *force* our help onto others, or set up 'supportive' relationships that secretly disable the other person. I used to help people so much that they eventually came to *require* my help. I'd achieve this by doing things for them until they felt uncertain about doing it by themselves. Whenever a girl I was seeing had a problem, I'd jump on it straight away without even giving her a chance to sort it out herself or allowing her to suffer through it as a learning experience. After a while, she'd come to expect this from me, and felt helpless when faced with issues by herself. I'd become her caregiver, and she would transform from someone who is capable of taking care of her own life to being completely dependent on me. I *judged* her as 'incapable of surviving without me', and then made the judgment come true by treating her as incapable — a manipulative trick known as *self-fulfilling prophecy*[13].

Sure, sometimes people are doing it 'wrong', but why can't they be allowed to learn from their mistakes? There's nothing inherently 'bad' about giving advice or helping people, of course — that's how we do a lot of teaching — but we'd better have a careful look at *why* we do it. Odds are, we're not doing it with the primary intention of making their lives better, because if that were true then we'd be doing what *they* asked for specifically, and only if that was likely to be the best for their long-term benefit. Our primary intentions are more likely to be about maintaining an impressive good person identity, 'saving' those we judge as stupid and incapable from themselves, and forcing others to owe us recognition and approval (a representation of the love we crave). Sure, there will definitely be *some* altruism and core values mixed in there, but it's so diluted with judgmental control as to be basically non-existent.

Being judgmental goes the other way, too: you may also treat people differently if you admire them. Maybe it's people you're attracted to, or elders, or intimidating strangers, or authority figures, or celebrities and wealthy people, or those you deem to be more intelligent than

13 Robert K. Merton, *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Summer, 1948), pp. 193-210

yourself. Your behaviour will become submissive and placatory around those *special* people. You'll let them cross boundaries in a way you wouldn't allow a lower-ranking person to do. You'll be more likely to hide controversial opinions, thoughts and feelings around them. You'll let them take up space that you're entitled to fill. This means you're seeing them as somehow 'more' than just another *homo sapiens* like you. That's being judgmental, too!

Do not be disheartened: facing your own judgmental tendencies will bring you closer to self-acceptance. All those judgments you make about others also represent the horribly inaccurate lens through which you view yourself. It was only through looking at myself accurately and stating clearly, "I am fucking judgmental and I need to do something about it" that I could finally find relief and clarity. Acceptance will never come from lying to yourself about your perspectives and intentions.

I had convinced myself that others 'needed' my help, but it was secretly just a strategy I employed to avoid acknowledging my fear that *I was not needed*; that I was unimportant and insignificant (and possibly unlovable). I remember coming home from my first major overseas travel — six months in the United States — only to find that everyone had carried on with their lives in New Zealand without needing me *at all*. I was heartbroken and terrified. I couldn't accept that I simply wasn't vitally important to other people. I had to face the truth that people didn't *need* me, and that I had to question why I kept forcing my help onto people who were clearly capable on their own.

Nowadays, when I help people it's because they've directly asked for it and have explained clearly what would be most helpful to them, and if they want to do it on their own, I step back (though sometimes I have to resist an urge to help without their consent). Instead of trying to please others with unsolicited help — incited by lying to myself with judgments about how incapable they are — I focus my efforts on my own development and allow others to come to me when they're ready.

Yes, sometimes people are offended that I don't offer help without being asked, but when I look at my life I can clearly see that I provide more value to people now than I ever did as a people-

pleaser, and I've yet to meet an offended people-pleaser who has a greater positive impact on the world than I do. That may sound like an unusual thing to say, but it's just the truth. By focusing on my own development and letting go of dishonest judgments, I do far more good for others than ever before.

SOLUTION:

Here's a practical tip: for an entire month, *stop helping people without permission* and *stop giving unsolicited advice*. Allow the chaos and carnage to ensue as you leave people alone to manage their own problems. This *doesn't* mean becoming psychopathically detached or allowing people to suffer. It means waiting until you're *asked* for help. It also means carefully exploring how you can encourage the person to help themselves instead of you doing it for them, even when they ask for help. If you want to help and advise people, start with the non-judgmental assumption that *they know what's best for themselves*, or at least that they can figure it out through trial-and-error.

Ask, rather than tell. If people want your help, ask what is the best way that you can help them, and then ask again if this is what will be best for their long-term future growth. Try to assume that your view of them as 'wrong' or 'stupid' is inaccurate, and that they may in fact know better ways of living than you do! Especially for themselves.

If people want your advice, encourage them to find a suitable expert who's more qualified than you to assist them. These days, when someone asks me for assistance with something outside of my small expert niche of confidence-building and social connection skills, I often find myself saying things like, "I can give you my opinion but I'd just be making shit up, so maybe you should consult with someone who knows this stuff." And even if I'm coaching a client in my field, I regularly remind them, "Deep down, you know what's best for you better than I do."

Yesterday, my wife asked me for advice on her *period*. The previous Nice Guy version of me would have spontaneously invented a step-by-step guide on how to handle it. But seriously, who the fuck am I to give a woman advice on menstruation? She's had hundreds of

periods, I've had none. I've had zero training in managing moon cycles. I've spent exactly zero hours training in medicine and biology. It's probably best that I keep my advice to myself and leave it to her, her girlfriends, and her gynaecologist. Even though *she asked*, it would be lacking in integrity for me to help. I had only lies and guesses to offer.

You'll often find yourself feeling compelled to give assistance because you'll be driven by a nagging internal voice telling you, "You know best." But here's the thing: you probably don't know best. You are never going to be an expert in *all* areas, not even many, so slow down before you offer support. Someone wants help with their car? Refer them to a mechanic. Someone wants advice on their diet? Help them find a reputable nutritionist. Someone's got money problems? Explain how you managed your money, and then clearly state that you are not a financial planner and don't really know what you're doing, it's just what works for you right now.

Other people don't need you to manage their lives, but *you* need you to manage your own life, and you've been neglecting yourself with this advice-giving, judgmental, controlling, dishonest bullshit. Get your own house in order before you even consider fixing someone else's.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- People-pleasing is a strategy designed to keep the "I'm a Good Person" identity alive. Unfortunately, because people-pleasing is deceptive and manipulative, you must lie to yourself about how honest you are.
- "This is who I genuinely am" is the belief that you are being authentic. Yet you hide anything truthful that might prevent someone, or yourself, from seeing you as anything but a 'good person'.
- "I'm basically an honest person" is the belief that, because you don't actively lie (yeah, right!), you must therefore qualify as being an honest person. Unfortunately, when you notice the amount of information you hide and misrepresent, it's impossible to qualify yourself as honest.
- "I'm non-judgmental" is the belief that comes from the idea that being a good person means you're fair and kind in your view of others. In reality, you judge them as either weak victims needing your support, or terrifying authorities that outrank you. None of these judgments are made on sound evidence.

KEY ACTIONS

- Notice how you behave differently around different people, and try instead to be more consistent. I used to ask myself, "How would I behave if I was alone or with my best friend right now?"
- After each social event, journal about all the manipulative things you did — exaggerations, hiding emotions, giving advice, false agreement, etc. — just to increase awareness of your deception strategies.
- Don't help or advise people unless they ask, and even if they do ask, guide them toward solving it themselves so that they don't need you.
- Never give advice that you wouldn't, couldn't, or don't already follow yourself.

People-Pleasing, part 3: Lies About the External World and Other People

"It was then that Hook bit him. Not the pain of this but its unfairness was what dazed Peter. It made him quite helpless. He could only stare, horrified. Every child is affected thus the first time he is treated unfairly. After you have been unfair to him... he will never afterwards be quite the same boy."

J.M. Barrie (from 'Peter Pan')

Bullshit Belief #7: The Universe Should be Fair

The concept of 'fairness' plays a massive role in the life of any people-pleaser and is at the heart of our motives. Many of us have a basic foundational belief that if you're 'good' (i.e. pleasing) you'll get rewarded, and if you're 'bad' (i.e. self-serving) you'll get punished, and that there will be a measurable consistency to this formula throughout the world. From a young age, we come to believe that the universe has an almost physics-like law of moral balance, where pleasing behaviour is rewarded and everything else is punished (or should be).

Inevitably, such a belief-system leads only to severe disappointment. I can recall countless times where I felt let down about not being rewarded the way I 'deserved', while 'bad' people received no obvious punishment for their harmful behaviour. Despite being able to see that the universe obviously did not function according to my beliefs around reward and punishment, I desperately clung to my version of fairness. I had invested in 'good' behaviour my whole life because I thought doing so would earn me a reward, so

I was unwilling to let go of that investment and recognise that my personal sense of fairness was more about how I wanted the world to work, rather than how it actually worked.

I would get very upset about people getting a raw deal. Things like bullying and greedy behaviour would ruin my day. I had such a huge sense of injustice — beginning with the belief that *my* life was unfair — that I couldn't witness unfairness without having a strong emotional reaction. This would lead me to fight others' battles for them without even being asked, and I was so hypersensitive about *balance* in any situation that I would expend much of my energy and focus on ensuring all situations were constantly fair for all parties involved (e.g. it would take me five minutes to perfectly split a piece of cake with my brother).

What I couldn't see clearly was that underneath my genuine concern for others' wellbeing was a selfish and unhealthy desire to *control* everyone. My version of fairness was really about me controlling how the world functioned. When things were fair by my standards, I felt at ease and in control. When they weren't, the chaos felt suffocating and I'd literally choke on my emotional reaction. I told myself I wanted things to be fair for everyone, but what I really wanted was a righteous excuse to manipulate people in any way needed to make *me* feel more comfortable.

Your justification for engaging in disingenuous people-pleasing behaviour is based largely on your unique version of fairness. *Treat others like you wish to be treated*, you tell yourself, in order to justify hiding your confrontational opinions and other truths. If you're honest with yourself, you'll notice the *transactional* nature of your kindness — how you're motivated to be nice to people simply because you expect that you will be rewarded for it. Observe the formula you're following:

"If I'm a good person, the universe will reward me (because it's fair). So to be good, I must be nice. To be nice, I must avoid making certain people feel uncomfortable. To avoid making people feel uncomfortable, I must be dishonest. Therefore, it's fair to be dishonest."

Yet when your belief of fairness is tested against evidence, you'll find it comes up woefully short. Take a moment to think about

what 'fair' means to you, personally. What would a fair world look like? What kind of behaviours are fair, and which are unfair? What happened to you recently that was unfair, and what would a fair alternative have been? If you could rule the world in a fair way, what would change? How do you feel about *other* people being dishonest with you because they're following the above formula?

Once you've answered those questions, now recognise how your personal version of fairness doesn't actually exist in the real world. If your idea of fair is true, then why are things so often unfair? Is the universe and the other people living in it failing to abide by the laws of fairness, or is it more likely that *you're* wrong about how the universe functions? Are you actually being good, or are you using dishonesty to trick people into thinking you're good? If you're consistently being dishonest, why do you deserve the rewards you believe you're entitled to? Have you really earned rewards, or do you just feel entitled to having an easier life than others? How is being rewarded for manipulating people considered 'fair'?

Take a moment, too, to consider those who would suffer if your version of fairness existed. I once believed that fairness was that everyone would love me the most because I was such an awesome person (in my own eyes). But for that to happen, everyone would need to have the exact same preferences, which would cause a plateau in human creativity and would stifle relationship dynamics. My idea of financial fairness would be for everyone to have the same amount of resources, but for that to happen we'd have to stunt the growth of entrepreneurs and business owners, and reward lazy and industrious people equally.

During my recovery from people-pleasing, I realised that if everyone had treated each other like I treated them and wanted them to treat me, we'd all be burnt out from exhaustion, disconnected from each other emotionally, and lacking a leader, since nobody would ever step up to take risks and call the shots. I thought it was unfair when people I liked died, and yet everyone dies eventually. I thought it was unfair that manipulative people succeeded, but that's exactly what manipulation is effective at doing, and I was also being manipulative myself in order to try and succeed. I was constantly imagining a 'fair' that didn't exist and couldn't exist, and I didn't even follow it myself anyway.

The world has never been fair (by your standards), will never be fair, and simply cannot be fair. Firstly, because there is no unified agreement on fairness — just our own subjective, insecure, and selfish perspectives. Secondly, without imbalance and instability nothing can adapt, grow, change, or thrive, so 'unfairness' is really just a necessary challenge that serves as a precursor to improvement. Adaptation comes from mutation, which is a reaction to stress and hardship. Strength and resilience are built only through enduring challenges. If you take that pain and challenge away from yourself — as you so often attempt to do with your people-pleasing and dishonesty — you weaken yourself, and set yourself and others up for failure. In hoping for fairness, you become ever more fragile in an unfair world, and you deprive yourself of rewarding challenges.

Does this mean that you are now justified in being unfair to others? No. In fact, you've probably been treating people quite poorly *in the name of fairness*: lying to them, manipulating them, hiding important truths from them, preventing them from making informed decisions, sulking when they don't reward you, expecting them to follow rules you made up without telling them. Hardly 'fair', is it? What you'll notice, if you can let go of the transactional concept of fairness where someone must first 'earn' respect and compassion from you, you'll actually become a much kinder person.

It took me a while to realise that I actually withheld kindness from both myself and others because of my obsession with fairness. I waited for someone to be of some value to me *before* I treated them well. I would only respect people *after* they first showed respect to me. Imagine if everyone acted like that! No one would go first, so no one would treat each other with genuine compassion. I also withheld rewards from myself because I was never 'good enough' to deserve them. I overworked myself, punished myself with judgmental thoughts, and gave up on enjoyable activities, simply because I didn't immediately excel in them. I was extremely unfair on myself... in the name of fairness!

You need to experience unfairness on a regular basis to harden your resolve, develop your problem-solving abilities, grow your empathy, accept the true brutality of existence, and have something

interesting to tell stories about. Don't deprive others or yourself of this education just to impose your unreasonable and biased view of fairness. So forget about things being fair, because this belief only leads you toward being dishonest (unfair to others) and unreasonably demanding of yourself (unfair to yourself).

SOLUTION:

Let things be 'unfair'. Seek to *accept* rather than to *control*. Focus so strongly on the parts you can influence — being more honest and living by your other values — that you have no room left to worry about anything outside of your control. Stop seeing life as a series of transactions, where you're only good toward people who 'deserve' it, and start being good for your own sake. Instead of withholding rewards from others and yourself in the name of 'fairness', focus on earning respect from yourself with honesty and compassion toward yourself and others.

If someone gets a raw deal, you don't have to fight for them: they can fight for themselves. You can just support them when it gets too much. And if they choose not to fight back, at least they'll build up some of the necessary frustration through failure that might build up toward a future breakthrough. If they do fight, they'll become less fragile and more adaptable, and you don't really want to interfere with that by being an unnecessary hero, right? Focus on acceptance and adaptability in a world that will always be unfair according to you, rather than day-dreaming about an impossible utopia.

Bullshit Belief #8: Everyone Can Like Me

Underneath all the stories about altruism that we tell ourselves in order to justify our dishonest behaviour, we know that there is but one motive for our people-pleasing: *to make everyone like us*. When we help someone, it's to make them think of us as helpful, so they'll like us. When we cheer someone up, it's to make them think that being around us is emotionally pleasurable, so they'll like

us. When we compliment someone, it's to make them feel good about themselves because of us, so they'll like us. It's all just a big point-scoring strategy. And underlying this strategy is an odd yet massively powerful belief: that eventually *everyone* will like you, or at least they will if you can just be *good enough*.

Ask any people-pleaser if it's possible to make all seven-billion-plus of the human population like you, and they'll laugh with you and say, "Of course not!" Yet, underneath this laughter, they secretly hope that it *is* possible. For those of you at the most extreme end of the people-pleasing spectrum, there's a belief that if you're just nice enough for a consistent period of time, you will eventually become *totally* likeable. Maybe not everyone in the world will like you, but certainly everyone you spend any time with. Then, with this achieved, you never need to worry about being abandoned ever again. We people-pleasers have a long-term vision: we plan to take over the world, one piece of approval at a time, until we are guaranteed control of everyone's emotions and therefore access to a reliable source of never-ending love.

There are lesser versions of this, of course. Some people-pleasers are genuinely OK with being disliked by certain people, providing those people are not significant, needed or liked. We can be OK with anonymous haters hating us, so long as they're not close family, our boss, our friend's new partner, and so on. Some of you will be OK with certain levels of dislike, provided they don't interfere with your life or put you at risk of feeling abandoned. Yet even this watered-down version of the 'become totally likeable' belief is still full of hope that the people we want to like us will all eventually come over to our side.

The bad news, of course, is that such beliefs are fundamentally incorrect. We each know, from vast anecdotal and eye-witness experience, that someone can unexpectedly change their mind about how they feel about us without even needing a rational reason. This truth is what terrifies the people-pleaser the most. We fear that we will be *found out*; that the lie will come crashing down or somehow stop being effective, and that those we love will suddenly feel differently about us, no matter how good we are or how consistently we've pleased them in the past. As much as

we hate acknowledging this, we know it to be true. But we try to convince ourselves otherwise.

We think we see evidence every day of how we can successfully manipulate people into liking us, so we assume it's just a matter of improving our performance. We assume the better we are at pleasing, the more people will like us, so we deduce that if we can continue improving our performance it will eventually become impossible to dislike us, right? Unfortunately not. Why? Because of one simple, undeniable fact: some people will hate you *because* you're a people-pleaser. There are people out there who can see through any performance, and they despise it immensely.

There was a guy in my high school, also named Daniel, whom I just could not win over. I had everyone else sorted. Basically, anyone in my high school who spent any time with me eventually came to like me, at least more than they disliked me. I worked very hard and mastered social manipulation to an art-form to ensure this outcome. Yet this one guy was impenetrable. No matter how hard I tried, I just *knew* he didn't like me. He didn't treat me badly or anything noticeable like that, but after many years of developing a hypersensitivity to how people felt about me, I could clearly see zero signs of approval coming from this guy. So, I did what any people-pleaser does when they realise that they can't win someone over: I avoided him.

Fast-forward about ten years, and both of us happened to be invited to a wedding in Fiji. We had five days together within a larger group. By this time, I had done a significant amount of self-development work and had mostly let go of my people-pleasing ways. Unlike high school, I no longer tried to win Daniel over or even to avoid him, though I made no major effort to interact with him either. I had made my peace with being disliked and was OK with spending a week in the presence of someone who thought I was a dick.

But then I noticed that Daniel was discretely observing me. There were moments of quiet contemplation where he seemed to watch me from the corner of his eye, like he was assessing me for some reason. I can't remember exactly how it happened, but at one point we were alone together and we unexpectedly plunged into a frank discussion about me. I learned, to my surprise, that he was feeling

a tentative respect toward me because I had "changed since high school." Then it hit me. In high school, he'd been perhaps the only one who could see that I was completely full of shit and trying to con everyone into liking me. Daniel had seen this and was unable to respect me at all. That's why it had always felt like he hated me.

No matter how pleasant you are, there will be exceptions: people you are unable to tame, no matter how hard you try. Maybe they see through your act and hate you for being manipulative. Maybe you remind them of their least favourite ex and they project resentment onto you. Maybe they're just bat-shit crazy, or maybe they hate all people, or maybe they're racist, or maybe they just don't like the way you walk. These and a million other exceptions will inevitably occur, no matter how skilled you become at pleasing people. I have known Pick Up Artist guys who've been practicing manipulating people for *decades* and even they still get regular rejections.

You'll never win over all the people — there will always be those that dislike or hate you. Your dishonesty is ultimately an ineffective strategy, because it can never achieve its primary goal of getting *total* approval. You need a new goal. Perhaps *creating high-quality connections* is a more worthwhile pursuit than trying to be liked by everyone. But you can't create deep and meaningful connections with dishonesty, so you'll have to change your approach. If you'd prefer having a few good people who *absolutely love you for who you are*, instead of having a large quantity of people who think you're just OK, then you'll need to switch from people-pleasing manipulation to powerful honesty.

If more people dislike you when you increase your honesty, you won't actually feel any harmful effects. Right now, notice how most of the population of the planet is completely ignoring you — because to them you don't exist. This is about the same treatment you're most likely to get from someone who hates you. If you can handle most of the world ignoring you, then you can also learn to handle the extra haters that your honesty may create (more on this concept later in the book)! Most people-pleasers are afraid that being hated ends in violence, embarrassment, loss of career, or social isolation, but the truth is: most of the time people who don't like you will simply stay away from you.

No harm done.

SOLUTION:

Remind yourself on a regular basis to *let* people hate you, but don't try to *make* them hate you. Being dishonestly contrarian and deliberately provocative is equally insecure as being a people-pleaser. Instead, just focus on being honest and let people choose for themselves whether they want to engage with you (we'll discuss this in greater practical detail soon). You will naturally polarize the bad-fit connections away from you. You'll also get much more respect from the people who value integrity, even if they don't like you much personally.

One Last Word: The *Benefits* of Being a People-Pleaser

I've been shitting on people-pleasing pretty hard in these last few chapters. I was deliberately trying to provoke and shock you because that's what helped *me* the most. I needed a wake-up call to see that most of my people-pleasing behaviour was dishonest, manipulative, unhelpful, and the main source of my inner misery. But it's important to acknowledge what I *gained* from my years as a Nice Guy as well.

I'm highly empathic and finely tuned-in to the way people feel. I can look at someone and accurately guess their mood, and even their specific thoughts and beliefs (I've tested this thousands of times with clients). I instinctively and unconsciously encourage people to disclose their darkest secrets to me while keeping them feeling safe, which enables them to release painful shame. I don't even know exactly how I do it, but it happens frequently. I am sure that my many years spent worrying about what others thought of me and watching them carefully, in order to avoid conflict, has allowed me to develop the skills that now serve me powerfully as a coach.

I have an affinity for fellow people-pleasers and Nice Guys. Where others will judge them as desperate, needy, shy, or cowardly, I know

from deep personal experience that there's more to it than that. People-pleasers are genuinely trying to be *giving*, underneath it all, and whenever I coach one of them into becoming more authentic they still remain generous, giving and compassionate afterward. People-pleasing requires effort, courage, empathy, and creativity. These skills and strengths are being wasted on a pointlessly dishonest pursuit. Most people-pleasers are 'good' at the core, if there is such a thing. We just tend to get our intentions mixed up with our insecurities. So, know that underneath your people-pleasing is a genuinely valuable member of the human race. Honesty will not change you, it will enhance you!

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- There is no such thing as a fair universe — people-pleasing does not score you points or entitle you to rewards of any kind. No one owes you anything, ever.
- No matter how pleasing you are, someone will still hate you, so you might as well just be honest and let people like or dislike you for who you really are.
- It's impossible to be a people-pleaser while being vulnerably honest, so that's the key to escaping this pointless, ineffective strategy, without having to worry about losing your kinder qualities.

KEY ACTIONS

- Let go of being a hero, and allow other people to suffer through hardship — you can help them resolve it, but don't do the work for them or try to prevent them experiencing pain — they need to grow.
- Whenever you're unsure of how to behave in a social situation, ask yourself: "What would I do right now if I wanted to be honest and was OK with everyone not liking me?"

Shame

"The truth is: Belonging starts with self-acceptance. Your level of belonging, in fact, can never be greater than your level of self-acceptance, because believing that you're enough is what gives you the courage to be authentic, vulnerable and imperfect."

Brene Brown

Shame

At one end of the self-worth spectrum we have pure self-confidence: the utmost 'good' you can feel about yourself. And at the opposite end of that spectrum, we have *shame*. In this book, shame is the word we'll use to describe that feeling you get when you believe that there is something 'wrong' with you. And *toxic shame*[14] is the term we'll use to describe the belief that you are wrong as an entire person: that you are fundamentally broken and unfixable in some core way.

Essentially, this book is all about using honesty to promote yourself up from the shameful end of the spectrum to the confident end, and to learn how to maintain your position up there. In this chapter, we're going to define what shame is, how it's created and maintained, and why honesty is the cure.

Note: the terms 'shame' and 'guilt' can be confused with each other, so let me define them carefully. Guilt is a *feeling*, usually a sickening, hot nausea in the stomach, often accompanied by blood rushing to the face and neck. Shame is the *belief or narrative behind the guilt* — an explanation for why you're having the guilty feeling, and it's usually something along the lines of, "Something true about me is wrong and bad, and I must hide it from other people."

14 I believe the term *toxic shame* was first coined by shame researcher Brene Brown.

Being ashamed is an in-the-moment guilt or disappointment you feel about yourself, usually in connection with a specific feeling or behaviour — you feel bad about an emotion you're experiencing or something you've done because it's 'wrong'. It's a temporal feeling, and all but the most psychopathic people will experience it on a regular basis throughout their lives. It can be a helpful indicator as to when you've strayed from your values.

Unfortunately, we can have this feeling even when we're living strongly by our core values if we've been conditioned to follow other people's rules. We can get 'tricked' into feeling ashamed when our valued-living contradicts someone else's preferences and they punish us for it. For example, you might quit going to university for all the right reasons, yet still feel guilty about disappointing your parents. This is what I call *socially-conditioned shame* — when you've been programmed by an external influence into feeling guilty about something that does not actually breach your values.

When your shame is 'tuned in' correctly (i.e. it's only taken seriously when you've breached your own values), it's an entirely helpful force. This is what I call *authenticity shame*. It's helpful to feel guilty when you've let *yourself* down, sacrificing your integrity for some instant gratification or avoidance of fear. It's helpful for building your confidence to feel a motivational level of guilt when you fail to follow your own principles, like when I feel bad about bingeing on sugar and sabotaging my health goals. In this chapter and beyond, we'll look at how to know when authenticity shame is giving you helpful information, and how to use honesty to make the most of the lesson it's trying to teach you.

However, if like most people you do *not* react helpfully to being ashamed, or you often fall victim to socially-conditioned shame, you can end up creating a monster inside of yourself. If you ignore the helpful warning signs that you're straying from your core values, or you react to socially-conditioned shame with compromise and conformity instead of standing up for yourself, you can end up creating an ongoing sensation of guilt that gets harder and harder to shake. Eventually, given enough time and influence from unhelpful people, you can become so confused about what you're supposed to feel ashamed of that you end up developing *toxic shame.*

Toxic shame is *devastating*. It refers to suffering from a constant sense of shame about who you are as a person. It's not limited to specific instances of 'bad' behaviour; it constantly hangs over you like a storm-cloud, undermining your achievements, souring your connections, and blasting you with the "I'm not good enough" story every day, eventually generating unbearable levels of chronic anxiety and depression. Simply put, toxic shame is the belief that there is something fundamentally 'wrong' with you — some unfixable internal error that affects everything you do and makes you unlovable.

You can be self-confident and experience *authenticity shame* at the same time, which is to say: you can be shameless about being ashamed (which we'll soon discuss in more detail), but you cannot be confident with *toxic shame*. So in this book, I hope to help you to: a) know the difference between authentic and socially-conditioned shame, b) react more helpfully to being ashamed, in order to build confidence in the longer-term, and c) use honesty to reduce your toxic shame.

How Dishonesty Creates Shame

To understand how toxic shame is created, we need to first understand how socially-conditioned shame works. Take a moment to answer this question:

What's the easiest way to make someone feel ashamed of themselves and destroy their self-confidence?

The answer — as any master criminal or school bully will tell you — is to censor, mock, criticize or reject them for *expressing themselves*. Wait patiently for them to show their true preferences, thoughts or feelings, and then punish them for it with embarrassment, ostracism and humiliation. Make it clear to them that compared to everyone else they are 'wrong' and don't fit in. Then you simply rinse and repeat. This is the recipe for destroying someone's self-worth. The crazy thing is, you don't even need to back this up with evidence in any way! This requires no proof or reasoning, all you need is judgment and abuse.

When kids started calling me a 'cry baby' in primary school, I slowly forced myself to turn off the tears. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I had (and still have) something called 'hypersensitivity' — I'm more reactive than most to physical pain, loud noises, bright lights, weird textures, food flavours etc., similar to people on the autism spectrum. But I didn't understand this when I was a six-year-old. All I knew was that the other kids ostracised me for crying. Being a child, I developed an immature strategy for preventing this rejection and loneliness: I taught myself to just stop crying... forever. To this day, I struggle to shed a tear. The effects of that particular socially-conditioned shame has lasted my entire life.

If you read between the lines, you can interpret this story in another way: I learned to be *dishonest* about the desire to cry. I would hide my pain, fear, anger and sadness to avoid criticism and rejection (crying was my default way of expressing painful feelings at the time). I censored myself, placing a permanent restriction on how honest I was allowed to be during these emotional states. Eventually, I found myself unable to clearly feel or understand these emotions because my main expressive output had been turned off. Throughout my teens, and most of my adulthood, I would interpret all of these emotions as 'stress' and found them incredibly difficult to decipher, express or process.

You will have a story like this, where you were punished in some way by others for just honestly expressing yourself, or you were rewarded for pretending to be someone you're not or for suppressing emotions. You were *socially conditioned*, and you've since maintained a strong censorship of yourself in relation to this experience.

Take a moment to reflect on the key experiences you've had that created socially-conditioned shame. Perhaps you were interested in dancing but all your friends thought it was 'gay', so you avoided it. Perhaps you came to believe that expressing attraction was wrong because one girl rejected you more harshly than you anticipated, so you stayed safely in the friendzone thereafter. Perhaps the topic of money makes you uncomfortable because you grew up poor and kids teased you about your cheap clothes, so you've always avoided budgeting and you struggle to manage your finances.

Oh wait… those are all *my* socially-conditioned shames!

Social conditioning is not a reliable measure of values. In an infamously unethical experiment involving conditioning in the 1920s, a baby known as "Little Albert" was successfully programmed to develop a life-long phobia of rats and white furry animals[15]. By crashing a large cymbal unexpectedly behind him when he saw a soft toy or a bunny, he started to associate pain and shock with white furry animals, despite never actually being harmed by one. Your socially conditioned shame is like this — you associate being honest with pain, without realising it was the crashing cymbal of social punishment that hurt you, not the 'furry rat' of your truthful self-expression. Correlation is not causation. Your honesty wasn't the problem, the bullying was, so there's no reason to believe that being honest is bad.

Now here's the tricky part: long after the last bullies teased you or your parent's final criticism was delivered, *you* continued punishing yourself. You took over the censorship role from them. I no longer have anyone calling me a 'cry baby' or telling me that I shouldn't cry — if anything, I have people criticizing me for being too stoic — and yet I still censor my tears. Why? Because through repeated acts of dishonesty, I have created my own shame and have trained myself to react automatically to potential tears by suppressing my emotions. I have the ingrained subconscious belief that there's something 'wrong' with me if I cry. No one else is doing this to me and it's not truthful, and I know this, yet it persists anyway.

Every time you hide the truth about yourself to avoid criticism, conflict, or rejection from others, you tell yourself that there's something 'wrong' with you. *You are bullying yourself*. You're the author writing the "I'm not good enough" story, and dishonesty is your pen. It no longer really matters whether other people think that you are wrong or bad because now *you* believe it strongly, so it's 'true' in your universe. And because your shames are nearly always based on something permanent that you can't change, such as naturally recurring human emotions or memories of the past, you get stuck in a position where there's *always* something wrong with you.

15 J. B. Watson and R. Rayner (1920)

Collect enough of these social guilt-trips and eventually your brain will start to generalise the shame. It's difficult to keep track of all those faults of yours, and far easier to just start labelling yourself as being 'wrong' overall. Every time you hide your truth, you throw another brick onto the shame pile, until eventually there are so many bricks that you psychologically collapse under the weight of them all, and voila! — you now have *toxic shame.* Or to put it simply:

You only feel bad about yourself because you have been consistently dishonest.

How Honesty Cures Shame (and Therefore Builds Confidence)

Thankfully, while dishonesty created your shame, honesty can rebuild your confidence. Or, more accurately, honesty can move you back along the self-worth spectrum towards the confident end, like a counterweight for all your secrets and lies. For this to happen, you must achieve the following objectives:

- Take control of and responsibility for your shame — ensuring no one else gets to decide what you feel guilty about;
- Clearly identify when you are 'right' to feel guilty about what you've done (authenticity shame from not living by your values), and teach yourself from this experience so that you can grow, rather than punishing yourself with the "not good enough" narrative;
- Undo the damage that years of self-censoring dishonesty has caused by you succumbing to socially-conditioned shame;
- Unpack your toxic shame into two distinct and separate categories: things you should be ashamed of (i.e. the ways in which you are currently breaching your values), and things you should not be ashamed of (e.g. past events that cannot be undone, natural human emotions, and valued-behaviours that you know are right even if others disagree).

Note: some people believe it's 'right' to feel ashamed of things you've done in the past. While I do believe that guilt is a helpful emotion when you've betrayed your own integrity, there is little benefit in beating yourself up for something that cannot be changed. If you regret your past behaviour, focus on either making up for it or learning a lesson and moving on. Sitting around feeling bad about your past self achieves nothing of value. Your past self is dead, let it rest in peace.

The Guilt Misfire

To simplify this mission, it all comes down to consciously determining what you *should* feel guilty about, and then labelling anything else as a *guilt misfire*. A 'misfire' is the term I use to describe when an emotion is triggered off for all the wrong reasons, like when you get angry even though no one has hurt you, or when you get scared but there's no actual danger. We should not suppress this emotion or label it as 'wrong' because doing so will only create more shame. Instead, we must compassionately recognise that the emotion we're experiencing is showing up due to psychological insecurities or inappropriate reasoning. In this way, it can be safely acknowledged *but it should not be obeyed*. It's like a child having a tantrum because he thinks that going to the doctor is bad — he's wrong, and should go to the doctor, but you can be compassionate about his pain when you take him there.

I often feel guilty about relaxing. I get a flush of shame when I'm 'caught' chilling out. But I have since learned to recognise that this is a misfire. I was conditioned by schooling and strict parenting to believe that I should always be working hard. Society has trained me to be an overachiever who feels unproductive unless I'm burning myself out with effort and achievements. Even though I can logically see that relaxing is good for me and aligned with values, like respect and compassion, emotionally I still react in the old way. So when this happens, I just acknowledge that I'm misfiring, and keep on relaxing despite the fading wash of shame running through my body. I simply *disobey* the conditioning but without

trying to shut down the feeling. And the easiest way to do this is to simply express myself honestly.

I will tell my wife that I'm feeling guilty about relaxing. This might feel like admitting to a crime, but it's just about making it OK to feel shame rather than hiding it and thereby compounding it. Too many people hide their shame, which compounds it because now you're ashamed of being ashamed — what I call 'shame squared'. You don't need to throw more wood on the fire! Being honest about your guilty feelings keeps your shame down to a minimal size. Also, hearing it said out loud can help you decide if you *should* feel bad or if you are just having a misfire. Whenever I hear myself say "I feel bad about taking a break" it sounds ridiculous, so I immediately identify that I'm misfiring. However, when I hear myself say "I feel guilty about eating so much sugar," I can quickly identify that I have indeed breached my values (I have cholesterol problems that are aggravated by sugar), so I know that the shame is authentic.

Your values are your guide. If what you're doing is aligned with your values and you've been honest about it (including any shame it triggered for you), then assume that there is no good reason to feel guilty about it, even if other people think you should. If what you're doing is honest, courageous, respectful, responsible, curious etc., then any shame you feel is probably a misfire brought on by social conditioning. Honestly express that misfire — e.g. "I'm feeling ashamed of this but it's probably just because I was conditioned as a child to think that it's wrong" — and then *keep on doing it* regardless of the emotional experience (but without trying to suppress the emotion itself).

However, sometimes it can be difficult to know whether the shame you're feeling is a product of social conditioning or an authentic push towards valued-living. Here are some key indicators you can check in with to figure it out:

Is it under your control?

If you're feeling guilty about something that is not *your current behaviour*, then it's a misfire. If the thing you're ashamed of is not directly under your control right now, then shame makes no sense. With regards to past events, if they went 'badly' but you were

trying your best to live with integrity, then it's still a misfire. And if you weren't living with integrity in the past, then redeem yourself with an act of integrity today. Once redeemed, any further guilt is a misfire (e.g. if you pay someone back for damaging their property and then still feel guilty about it).

Is it objectively harmful?

Would all people be harmed by this (e.g. a punch in the face), or does it only hurt people with certain beliefs (e.g. causing offence)? If it aligns with your values and only certain people guilt-trip you about it, find some new people to hang out with. If someone is only harmed by your expression or behaviour because of their own unique beliefs, and you weren't deliberately trying to harm them, then that says more about them than it does about you. It makes no sense to feel guilty about someone else's beliefs.

Which value of yours does it specifically violate?

If you cannot clearly identify that one of your values is being breached, then it's likely to be a guilt misfire. Knowing your values is obviously key to this, so if you haven't done that work already, get onto it. The BROJO *Discovering Your Core Values* course can help you with this, and is free to the public.[16]

Would you still feel ashamed if no one caught you doing it?

Certain behaviours, like masturbation or relaxation, usually only come with shame if someone else finds out about it. This is socially-conditioned shame — there's nothing objectively 'wrong' with these behaviours, and you know it. And there are other behaviours which might feel good when you're alone but feel awful when someone whom you respect catches you, like bingeing on chocolate when you're supposed to be taking better care of your health. That's authenticity shame. Who would have to catch you for you to feel guilty? Why would you feel bad if they did? These are factors worth considering.

Are you OK with other people doing it?

People-pleasers and similar types often have a habit of setting impossible standards for themselves while being more

16 https://www.brojo.org/university

compassionate and understanding of others. Generally, if you respect, like, or admire others for doing something, then that thing aligns with your values. If you feel guilty for doing that same thing because you hold yourself to a higher standard, you are misfiring — probably because someone set impossible standards for you as a child or punished you for getting things 'wrong'.

In the following chapters, we'll explore shame in more specific contexts: *experiencing emotions* and *socialising* — the two areas people have the most shame.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Being ashamed is believing and feeling that something true about you is wrong and bad, and you must not let other people know about it.
- Shame is created by you deciding that something true about yourself is wrong or bad and must be hidden, so you are dishonest about it.
- *Toxic shame* is feeling guilty for who you are as an entire person.
- You can be confident while experiencing any emotion except for toxic shame.
- Authenticity shame is the guilt you feel when you breach your own values.
- Socially-conditioned shame is the guilt you feel when you do something that someone else believes is wrong (but you're actually OK with it).
- A guilt misfire is when you feel shame for something you have no good reason to be ashamed of: it's normal, or it's outside of your control, or it aligns with your values.
- Being honest about your shame will help you sort out what you should feel guilty about.

KEY ACTIONS

- Look back over the last week and notice all the truths you hid about yourself — list as many as you can remember. These are examples of your shame.

Emotional Shame

"We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too."

Langston Hughes

Hiding Uncomfortable Emotions

Shame is attaching the sense of 'wrong' or 'bad' to something that is true about you. Emotional shame, therefore, is when you specify an emotion as being wrong or bad, even though it's natural and you regularly experience it. This shame leads us to mask and suppress the emotion in question, seeing ourselves as a failure or as someone who's at risk of social punishment for showing how we feel. When we hide our emotional state, we implicitly confirm to ourselves that it is wrong or inappropriate to experience a normal human emotion. There will never be a time in your life where you do not feel anything, so how are you supposed to achieve consistent self-worth if you punish yourself for experiencing inevitable emotional sensations?

The coaching clients I work with often trace the inception of their emotional shame back to their childhood. For men, the most common scenario they describe is an angry parent (usually the father) reprimanding them for expressing certain 'unmanly' emotions like sadness, excitement, or confusion. For the women I've worked with, I've found that they were often shamed for expressing depression, lust, and anger. Their emotions were dismissed as being melodramatic, slutty, or annoying, particularly in teen years. Both genders report being rewarded socially for 'positive' emotions like happiness, and punished for feeling 'negative' emotions like frustration. Also, my clients often recall experiencing harmful consequences when they were intensely emotional, or when someone else was, and have since

come to blame that emotion for the consequences, like blaming your father's rage and violence on the emotion of anger.

I personally believe that one of the worst parenting mistakes is making a child feel that they have done something wrong just because their emotional expression is inconvenient to the parent. When a child is reprimanded for simply crying (sadness), having a temper-tantrum (anger), whining (powerlessness), or being annoying (boredom), they receive a clear message: "It is wrong to experience those emotions." Effective parents will take care to distinguish the behaviour from the emotion, e.g. "It's OK to be angry but it's not OK to hit Daddy." This clarification of the difference between feelings and behaviour is probably a crucial deciding element as to whether shame will be prevented or encouraged, because behaviour can be controlled but feelings cannot.

Everyone has different emotions they choose to hide, and different situations they choose to hide them in. Most people I know choose to hide anything that will expose a potential 'weakness'. In my guy friends, it's feelings like anxiety, confusion, love and sadness. In my clients, it's more likely to be anger, fear and depression. Even feelings of happiness, excitement and anticipation can be shameful for some, like the prisoners and gang members I've worked with who are expected by their peers to be aggressive and stoic at all times. The common theme is the fear of negative social repercussions if the 'weak' emotion is revealed. I bring this to your attention to help you understand that it is far more normal and common to hide emotions than you might have realised. This does not justify dishonesty, but perhaps you can start to see that you're not weird for feeling the way you do.

What is most bizarre about this behaviour is that we hide things that everyone can relate to. When we hide fear, for example, we often do so because we think we are the only ones who feel afraid. But everyone is afraid of something — those few who aren't would not survive very long (imagine what you might do if you weren't afraid of pain or death) — so it's completely illogical to assume that you're the only one. Every human experiences a range of emotions, yet they hide these emotions to avoid being judged by others who also feel this way. You think you're the only one who's afraid, so you pretend to be brave, which leads others to believe that *they're* the

only ones to be afraid, so they hide their fear, which you in turn see as confirmation that you're the only one. On and on, *ad infinitum.*

Take some time to reflect on where your emotional shame was created. It's important to understand your shame if you wish to become more honest, because full honesty requires shamelessness. Look back over your life: can you theoretically pinpoint the moments where someone else persuaded you to believe that it was wrong to experience a natural human emotion? Here are some questions worth answering:

Who taught you this?

For me, it was authority figures like parents, teachers, and cooler peers, none of whom are experts in psychology, shame or confidence. I received no feedback on managing emotions from psychologists and philosophers, or healthy confident adults.

Why did they teach you this?

You may have to guess or assume here. I came to the conclusion that it was because it made me easier to manage and made them feel special (for being able to control me). Also, it made them feel more normal because they'd create another person like themselves.

Were they trying to help you or were they trying to control you for their own benefit?

They were definitely trying to control me. I never asked for people to tell me how I should feel or who I should be, so this was unsolicited feedback and manipulation. And even if they were trying to help me, they didn't. Emotional suppression only brought me misery in the long run.

Are they a healthy role-model?

Nowadays, when I look back, I can clearly see that most of the people who influenced me to become ashamed were emotionally fucked up themselves, so no; not the best role-models.

Did you make the mistake of believing that it's not 'normal' to experience natural human emotions?

Yes, I thought nobody else was suffering like I was. I thought feelings like anger, confusion, depression and anxiety were rare. I was wrong.

Identifying Your Shameful Emotions

The following list of emotions are those that my coaching clients most commonly report feeling ashamed of. Browse through this list and reflect on how much shame you have attached to each one. Note that you may have contextual shame with some (you only believe that they're 'wrong' in certain situations or around certain people), while others are completely shameful; you keep them hidden almost all of the time. The emotion you feel free to express in nearly all situations is the least shameful, while the emotion that is only 'appropriate' on rare occasions is the most shameful. This exercise will give you a clear sense of which emotions you need to start expressing honestly more often, in order to rebuild your confidence. Under each emotion I've included a little tip on how you can display this emotion more shamelessly:

Happy

How to express happiness: this is about honestly recognising what you like, enjoy and appreciate. Each evening, write a list of things you are grateful for, and the following day share your gratitude with someone, e.g. "Dude I was stoked when my girlfriend made me dinner." Start spontaneously expressing when you like or enjoy something. Even if people around you are complaining while you feel calm, grateful and relaxed, let them know you're feeling this way. The key here is to accept that you enjoy life and that happiness is how we appreciate life.

Sad

How to express sadness: this usually means talking about feeling down, missing things, wanting things you can't have, and regretting things in the past. When you feel like you've lost something important to you, don't put on a fake smile and pretend things are

all good — let people know that you're "down" or "sad" or "grieving". The key here is to accept that everything comes to an end, and sadness is how we process change and say goodbye.

Angry

How to express anger: this is about recognising what you dislike and disagree with, and what hurts you. When someone crosses your boundary, say: "Please don't do that, I don't like it." When something happens that bothers you, let it be known, e.g. "This new pop song is driving me nuts, I can't stand it." Get it out before it builds up; there's no need for violence or abuse. The key here is to accept that anger is a force of strength that allows us to maintain boundaries.

Confused

How to express confusion: this is simply about being able to say "I don't know" and "I don't understand." Let people see that you don't always have clear answers or a sense of where you're going next. Instead of pretending to have everything sorted out, learn to say things like: "I'm not sure" and "I'm confused" and "I'm feeling a bit lost right now." The key here is to accept that confusion is the transitional state of mind that your brain goes through as it creates new understanding, and you just have to wait it out.

Disgusted

How to express disgust/offense: this is when you feel that something breaches your ethics, values or morals — the things you think are repugnant, wrong and bad. Start letting people hear what your opinions are on key topics. Don't pretend to support something you take offence to. The key here is to accept that disgust lets you know what your beliefs are, what's unhealthy for you, and who you shouldn't be friends with, but remember that no one has to agree with you.

Stressed

How to express stress: this is about revealing when you're overwhelmed, frustrated, and struggling to succeed. It's about showing that you're not unbreakable, that you have limits. The next

time you feel under pressure, try saying "I'm stressed out, I need a break," instead of just powering through. The key here is to accept that stress is your mind and body's way of telling you that you are reaching a breaking point.

Manic

How to express mania: this is about letting people see when your mind is going "crazy" — when you're overwhelmed by ideas or bursting with unused energy. When entering into a hyper state or feeling overwhelmed with ideas, it's usually good to talk about the mania itself rather than all the specific ideas and feelings. Saying, "I have too many thoughts right now!" is easier than trying to share each of the thoughts. The key here is to understand that mania is like your brain turning off all its filters, which is great for brainstorming new ideas but difficult for taking action on any one of them.

Depressed

How to express depression: you may need to take more care with expressing depression, as other people may not be understanding or helpful. I recommend with any mental illness that you first speak to professionals, or at least friends/family that you trust will react with non-judgmental compassion. Words and phrases that are likely to come up might include: apathy, depressed, no point to anything, no feeling, I'm down all the time, I can't get out of bed, etc. The key here is to understand that depression usually indicates that you've got deeper core work to do on yourself, and medical, professional and/or loving support can only occur if you open up to the right people.

Anxious

How to express anxiety: talk about how you're worried, what you anticipate going wrong, and the nauseous sensations that come up. Learn to say "I'm nervous." Most people often are! You can also frame anxiety as a helpful state of energy, such as, "I'm shaking with anticipation about speaking on stage." The key here is to accept that anxiety is simply a buzzing preparation that, if embraced, will actually enhance your performance. It's also a warning to double-

check that you're not focused on something you can't control (e.g. the future).

Bored

How to express boredom: practice using words like agitated, restless, bored, and lacking direction. Let people see that you don't always know how to spend your time wisely. Tim Ferriss says, "The opposite to happiness is not sadness, it's boredom," and I agree with him. The key here is to accept that boredom is your brain's way of telling you that you are lacking purpose and direction, and you're afraid of the implications. Welcome to being a human!

Afraid

How to express fear: it's as simple as saying "I'm scared of that." Variations include: "I'm feeling hesitant" or "That makes me nervous." Let people see that you perceive certain things as threatening or dangerous. Remember, being afraid doesn't make you a coward, but hiding fear from others does. The key here is to understand that fear is an opportunity to practice bravery, and even just admitting to being afraid can be a huge step towards building confidence.

Feelings vs. Behaviour

Most of our shame around emotions probably comes from assumed correlations with behaviour. We tend to *blame* emotions for our actions, yet emotions are not responsible for what we do. Anger is not the cause of violence; the decision to hurt someone is. Anger can be experienced without causing any harm to others. And sometimes we blame our emotions for causing other people's pain, like thinking that your happiness causes someone else to feel jealousy. Their jealousy comes from their beliefs about not having enough — it's got nothing to do with you. Sure, your happiness may have reminded them of these beliefs, but you did not create those beliefs in the first place. You can be happy without others getting jealous, it all depends on who they are.

Emotions by themselves are not responsible for anything 'bad' in the world. Yes, they can be uncomfortable to experience, but who said discomfort was bad? It's absolutely necessary for positive change (which we'll explore in further detail later). Uncomfortable emotions can drive improvements in behaviour, if the person so chooses. Sure, emotions can be an influential force behind harmful behaviour, but they do not *cause* it. Psychopaths do horrible things without feeling anything at all, while highly emotional people can still be loving, kind, and compassionate at all times. I can use my anger to protect my wife or attack her, the choice is mine. Depression can be a gateway to personal growth or suicide, the choice is mine. Even hatred can positively motivate me, depending on how I choose to use it. My hatred for corrupt politicians drives me to coach leaders of integrity to replace them — would you say that hatred is bad in that context?

Taking Things Personally and Avoiding Embarrassment

If someone challenges the way you feel, you don't need to defend yourself — you're not in any real danger. Most of the time, you'll clearly see that there are no obvious harmful consequences from refusing to respond to someone who tries to shame your emotions, and yet so many people react defensively about their emotions. They either attempt to prove themselves right and convince the other person to accept them (which is not the same thing as a healthy boundary-setting confrontation), or they back down with an apologetic surrender and suppression of emotion. If you want to become emotionally shameless, you'll need to stop defending your emotions — they don't need to be defended, they've done nothing wrong.

Defending your emotions shows that you worry about other peoples' opinions of you, and that you are invested in maintaining a certain impression or reputation (in order to prevent more 'bad' feelings from arising). You'll tell yourself horror stories about the consequences of not defending yourself in the face of a personal

attack, of how you'll lose your job, your friends and family, or something even more drastic. But when was the last time you put this to the test? Probably never, because the stories are too scary to risk messing with.

When we finally get past the various stories we use to justify being defensive, we see there's really only one reason we defend or hide our emotions: to avoid *embarrassment*. We do not want to be perceived as 'less than' others, e.g. 'too emotional'. The idea of being judged by others as 'different from the rest' fills us with dread. Yet we rarely explore *why* we feel this way. We hardly ever test to see what really happens if we just let people judge, criticize, hate, and even spread lies about us. What really happens if we just endure embarrassment, confusion, loneliness, and other 'shameful' emotional states without trying to defend ourselves?

Emotional shame defensiveness comes from taking something personally, specifically: something critical that another person has expressed about the way you feel. We feel threatened and attacked when they express these judgments, even if it's merely a belief that is different from our own, and we feel compelled to *do something about it*. We feel that we must provide explanations or pretend we don't feel the way they perceive us to feel, to prevent this from going further and getting worse. We panic at the idea of not being understood: as being seen inaccurately or being unfairly judged by others. We lose sight of the fact that we don't have to prove ourselves, and don't need to take responsibility for someone else's view of our emotions.

Let Them Judge!

A huge breakthrough I experienced with shamelessness occurred when I experimented with not defending myself from personal attacks. As a deliberate test, I refused to prove myself to anyone for a few weeks, just to see what would happen. When someone questioned my preferences or feelings, I shrugged my shoulders and said, "It is what it is." When someone told me I was wrong to react a certain way, I recognised their right to an opinion but

I didn't bother explaining myself further. When someone asked me to justify my emotions, I remained literally silent: I just raised my eyebrows and looked at them quietly until they walked away (yes, this was extremely uncomfortable to do).

This experiment taught me a valuable lesson: I don't *need* to defend my emotions. People would often find themselves corrected naturally over time. People who hated me for unfair reasons would either disappear from my life forever, or have the truth show itself to them slowly over time, until they eventually came crawling back with a sheepish, "Looks like I was wrong about you." All the horror stories in my mind about losing my job, losing all my friends, getting a bad reputation, having my life ruined by gossip, and so on, never happened in any measurable way. Simply stated: dropping defensiveness about my emotions significantly improved my life with no negative consequences at all!

This gave me the courage to *really* start expressing myself. I let my subordinates at work see that I was stressed and confused. I let my dates see that I was needy and nervous. I let my parents see that I was angry. I let my friends see that I was bored. I let my dance buddies see that I was feeling anti-social. I let strangers see that I was sad. I let *everyone* see *everything* I was feeling. What followed was a sense of total freedom. People who judged me or reacted badly simply drifted away from my life because I refused to engage with them, while others came closer because it was now easy to connect emotionally with me. Win, win, win.

When you defend your emotions, you automatically confirm that they *need* defending. This creates shame. The truth doesn't need protection, it will prove itself naturally over time. A confident person does not require a defence, so why wait to start treating yourself as being worthwhile? If you reduce your defensiveness, you'll notice a gradual improvement in self-worth. You don't need to defend something that naturally occurs. You don't need to defend gravity, or your need to drink water. These things are beyond question. Your natural human emotions must be treated as such because they are also beyond question.

Sure, someone can challenge your ideas and give you feedback on your behaviour, but know the difference between someone

challenging what you *feel* and what you *do*. Your emotions don't justify acting poorly, but the feelings themselves aren't up for debate. And most importantly, whether you're 'good' or 'bad' as a person is *never* up for debate, ever. If someone challenges your emotions, treat it like they've just denied the existence of gravity, or they've claimed to have survived without water their entire lives; they're lunatics that you must keep your distance from, and you must always avoid discussing their crazy, pointless ideas.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- We are taught to be ashamed of emotions, but there is no reason for us to be. Most of the time, we just think they're 'wrong' because they were inconvenient to someone else in the past.
- You experience emotion all the time, so if you can become emotionally shameless, you can become totally confident.
- Being embarrassed is often the most shameful emotion, but that can only occur if you're attached to 'winning' other people's approval. If you're OK with them not liking you, you'll be OK with yourself as a person.

KEY ACTIONS

- List the emotions in order from the ones that you are the most ashamed of to the ones that you are the least ashamed, then take some of the above recommended actions to express them more often.
- No matter what, do not defend yourself this week (unless you're physically attacked).

Social Worthiness and Trust

"What other people think about me is not my business."

Michael J. Fox

Shame in The Social World

When you're ashamed of something about yourself, it means that you have made an assessment of that truth and decided it is 'wrong'. In other words, you've decided that it is not worth expressing or sharing with certain people. Before you are about to speak, you make a judgment call about whether you will share this truth: the most relevant deciding factor as to whether something is 'worth' sharing ends up being with whom you are sharing it. Are they safe? Will they hurt you? Will they accept you? Can you trust them? Your honesty becomes moderated by your audience. Shame puts other people in control of your self-expression.

There's an exercise I do with my coaching clients called *The Shame Grid*. In a nutshell, it involves listing every truth about yourself that you feel at all ashamed of (i.e. you would not share it readily with everyone in the world). Next to that list, you cross-reference those shames against the main people in your life, including specific people like 'mom' or 'my boss Doug', as well as more general categories of people you're likely to come into contact with, like 'strangers' or 'workmates'. You assess each shameful truth in relation to the different people, rating how ashamed of it you are with each particular person or group. You'll find that there are some things you're OK with your mother knowing about but not your girlfriend. You might not mind telling your friends about your sex-life but you'd never tell your boss. And so on.

What this exercise reveals is that shame is *socially contextual*. While there may be some truths that you'll take to your grave and never tell a soul, most other truths vary in shamefulness depending on whom you're with at the time. This is essentially another layer to the assessment you are making about worthiness. For each truth there is a baseline assessment of worthiness (i.e. how generally ashamed of it you are); then you reassess it again when faced with the decision around sharing it with a specific person. Something might be worthy of sharing with your friends, like your masturbation habits, but when your father suddenly shows up and enters the conversation, you feel your face blush and chest tighten and all of a sudden it's not worth sharing anymore.

It's through this assessment that we see how we set up our confidence to depend on other people: our perception of other people decides how truthful we'll be, and that determines how confident we'll be (because confidence is the opposite of shame). When you share a truth, you automatically confirm it to be worthy of sharing, and therefore you attach more worth to yourself overall when you're honest. This is why people often feel more confident in the presence of good friends or a support group. The less often we feel able or willing to share, the more shame and worthlessness we attach to the truth about ourselves and the less we feel worthy overall, and so our confidence plummets when we're dishonest. Do you see where I'm going with this? In simple terms, the recipe for self-confidence comes from being able to answer this question:

How do I become totally shameless around everyone, all the time?

If you can get to a point where there is no limit to your honesty — you share all truths regardless of who is listening — then you will become able to attach worth to everything about yourself. You will stop implying that something is wrong with you by hiding it. No one will have the power to shut you up. In other words, you will be *shameless*, which is just another word for confident.

Waiting for Trust

If becoming confident really is as simple as opening up honestly to everyone, why don't more people do it? Well, partly it's because we're brought up to believe that dishonesty is a necessary evil, but there's more to it than that. The main barrier that prevents us from being radically honest with everyone is something we like to call *trust*.

Trust is the result of an assessment: a judgment of a person's character and a subsequent prediction of their behaviour. When it comes to truths we are ashamed of, assessing trust specifically means determining how likely a person is to be discreet with our personal information, and how unlikely they are to use it against us in a harmful way (or to react badly). If we deem that someone is likely to keep it to themselves and never hurt us with it, we'd say they're 'trustworthy'. This increases our own assessment of the worthiness of the shameful truth in question, i.e. we can be more shameless around trustworthy people. We feel safe in the presence of someone who passes our assessment of trust, and so we become more honest.

Trust, therefore, is the honesty gatekeeper (for most people). If you're like most people, you will feel resistant to being totally honest with someone you don't trust. You might consider this to be a reasonable precaution, since it seems smart to avoid giving personal information to untrustworthy people. You probably assume that they will hurt you if you disclose too much, that they'll start sharing it with other untrustworthy people or using it to blackmail you or using it to cause you to lose something (e.g. telling secrets to your boss that will get you fired). So your ability to be confident is limited by how much you trust other people.

Can you see the problem with this? Because you've got trust as a gatekeeper, you hide your truth when you don't trust someone, which means that when you're around untrustworthy people you create shame and therefore lower your self-confidence. Get it? You're in a situation where *untrustworthy people can stop you from building confidence*! If you allow someone's untrustworthiness to prevent you from speaking openly, you will hide information about yourself while in their presence, which your mind will interpret as:

"This is not worthy of sharing... this is wrong or bad in some way, so I am not worthy and I am bad in some way." Concealment of this kind has the same effect as lying. You're telling yourself, "I can't handle this person knowing my information... which means I'm weak, and unable to manage harmful consequences... which means they have power over me."

If you are waiting to feel safe (i.e. trusting) before you express yourself shamelessly, you'll remain ashamed for the rest of your life. You rely on trusting others only because you don't trust *yourself* to handle someone betraying you, sharing your personal information without permission, or trying to leverage it against you. You suppress most of your shameful information, waiting until you're in the presence of someone you trust. And it's only then that it all comes pouring out because you finally feel safe.

This is a major problem, because assessing someone as 'trustworthy' is likely to be riddled with cognitive biases and errors of judgment.

Comedian Chris Rock once made the ruthlessly clinical assessment: "A man is only as faithful as his options." This was a clever insight into human nature. See, when you trust someone, you're essentially gambling on an assumption, which is: "They value the secrecy of this information as much as I do, *and* they will never change." That's a pretty big assumption to make about someone. Every human has their price. *Some* people have so much integrity that you'd need to threaten their children to get secret information out of them, but most people don't have that level of discipline, and I promise you very few people care as much about your privacy as you do. You have no idea what temptation or distractions they'll be subjected to in the future. You'd be amazed at how many people have caveats to their loyalty. For example, many people will say, "I won't tell anyone" but they tell their partner everything and consider that to be an exception. So now you're also trusting *their partner* without knowing it. What if their partner is a gossip?

And of course, trust is the feeding ground for manipulative con artists. They gain your trust, get you to reveal information that makes you vulnerable, and then use that information against you. And the only reason they can use it against you is because you only share it with trusted people and aren't willing to let it spread

beyond them. The con man knows you'll do anything to prevent the spread of information you're ashamed of. They can use this to maneuver you. Ironically, according to many con artists I worked with during my time in Corrections, the most suspicious and closed off people are often the easiest to manipulate because they're the most ashamed. You can flatter them for their 'sensible' approach to hiding information, use that flattery to pry personal details out of them, and then abuse them mercilessly because they are so scared of sharing.

A shamelessly honest person, on the other hand, is *impossible* to blackmail and nearly immune to manipulation. When you trust that you will be able to handle your secrets being revealed, then another person being 'trustworthy' is no longer required for you to feel safe in expressing yourself. You cease to depend on others for building your confidence through honesty. Revealing my secrets may lead to negative consequences, but if I feel certain that I will manage any of those consequences then there's no reason to hold back and shame myself, even in the presence of someone I *know* to be untrustworthy. I can let my secrets out to total strangers (like I do through my writing), safe in the knowledge that my shamelessness will make it impossible for those strangers to hurt me using such information. As long as I am OK with everyone knowing everything about me, I'm fucking untouchable! And you can be too, once you realise that being secretive doesn't protect you, it only makes you more vulnerable to attack.

If someone reveals your secret abortion to your boss, but he's already heard it directly from you, it's the betrayer who will suffer because now the boss knows they are a gossip. If your girlfriend finds out that you used to be a drug addict through your honest disclosure of it on your first date, no bitter ex-girlfriend can sabotage the relationship by revealing your history. If the stand-up comedy audience knows you're nervous because you candidly admit to it, the hecklers will just look pathetic if they try to give you shit. *If they hear it from you first, it doesn't matter who betrays you.* Even if you mistakenly assume someone is trustworthy and they actually aren't, it's a harmless error because they can't do any damage. It's only when we need someone to be trustworthy that we set ourselves up for suffering.

You can create connections without this need for trust. In fact, skipping past the 'I need to trust you first' phase will enable connections to happen much faster. Ironically, the quickest way to build trust with someone is to share shameful truths about yourself. It tells people that you value honesty, that you're non-judgmental, that you're willing to let them into your inner world, and that it's safe to share with you. When someone admires how vulnerable you are, they are far more likely to gamble on opening up to you. Try it and see! You'd be amazed at how quickly a deep relationship can form. The first time I proposed, to my now wife, was within a year of us being together. She only said "no" because it seemed too fast by conventional standards, but when we look back now we are certain that we already loved each other enough by then to take a plunge. This shameless proposal was a result of our no-holds-barred, shameless honesty conversation style, that we practiced from our very first meeting.

Comparing Yourself to Other People

A sure-fire way to increase your shame is to compare yourself to other people. Most people in social situations try to measure and establish their status, social worth, or ranking compared to others. Whether it's in prison, at the office, or while enjoying a birthday party, we try to figure out who's *better* and who's *worse* than us. Sometimes this is in specific areas of focus, such as who makes more money, and other times it's more of a vague, overall measurement of worthiness. This happens in terms of conscious thoughts, like "She's prettier than me," as well as subconsciously held beliefs that create inexplicable sensations, like feeling suddenly nervous when you find out that the guy you're casually chatting with is the CEO of your company.

How honest you are willing to be is probably dependent on believing you are 'better' when compared to the person you're talking to. You might feel safer to open up to someone 'worse' than you because you assess their opinion as unimportant and harmless. Sometimes people can also suffer from *Imposter Syndrome* (seeing yourself as a worthless fraud who will soon be discovered), or they can feel

pressured to put on a good show for those whom they admire. This can cause people to hide their 'weaknesses' and shame in front of others, again giving other people power over their ability to be honest and therefore their ability to build confidence.

While these comparisons can often appear to be contextual and specific — i.e. only a small aspect of each person is compared — the implications for how you view yourself as an entire entity can be catastrophic. If I believe that being smart is what makes me who I am, and then I meet someone who is clearly 'smarter' than me, I'll give myself a negative rating. We often judge ourselves as 'less' than someone else, usually in reference to a specific skill or possession, yet most of us lack the ability to compartmentalize this difference and so we take it personally. Think back to the last experience you had where your self-worth was destroyed in an instant merely by meeting someone 'better' than you at something. I remember many times in my youth where there would be someone funnier than me at a party — I would panic and flush with shame, impotently lost in feeling that I was no longer The Funny Guy. This would lead me to either retreat and hide or to try outperforming my rival… both of which were dishonest strategies that increased my shame.

Comparative differences can be the gateway to shame if you aren't careful. You might think that nothing bad will come from 'accurately' assessing someone else as 'better' than you, yet in doing so you imply that you are 'worse' than them, and therefore unable to share yourself fully. This usually starts as a small, specific judgment — "He makes more money than I do" — but can quickly escalate into a big conclusion about your entire self — "I'm useless because I don't make enough money." Your mind will struggle to separate the original assessment from your deeper fears about abandonment and insecurity. Thinking your workmate is better at speaking up in meetings can trigger irrational fear about losing your job, which leads to beliefs that you don't deserve this job… or any job for that matter… because you're such a fucking loser who never gets anything right… and can't even get a girlfriend… and so on. And because you are also keeping all this darkness to yourself, your shame is multiplied by further dishonesty about the shame itself.

The difficulty with this unhelpful pattern is your stubborn belief in the accuracy of your assessments — the same problem you

have with trusting people. Obviously, you're mostly accurate when you're observing objectively measurable differences, like someone being able to run faster than you, but you'll also remain stubbornly certain of your accuracy when measuring highly subjective topics like appearance, value, attractiveness, and likeability. These assessments will determine the limits to your honesty — how 'worthy' your truth is in the current social situation — and therefore restrict how confident you can be.

This comparison-shaming compulsion is always heightened if you're focused on traits you've attached your identity to — the things you think are 'special' about you. When comparing these traits with others, your objectivity goes out the window. I can register the fact that someone is better at fixing cars than I am without losing any love for myself, because I have no attachment to being a mechanic or being known as mechanically skilled. But when I meet someone who I believe is superior in coaching, writing, or public speaking, the doubts about my worth as a person will come creeping out of my mind's basement, and feelings of defensiveness and shame build as a result, tempting me into secrecy and dishonesty.

The problem underlying all this shame is that your reaction to being 'worse' is to restrict your expression of truth when you most need to express it. You hide in the shadows to avoid the embarrassment of being a 'lesser' person. This kind of thinking and behaviour 'confirms' that you suck. Someone being better than you at something actually tells you nothing objective about how worthwhile it is to express yourself honestly. There's no reason you can't admit to feelings of inferiority — most people will take it as a compliment, and those who brag and capitalise on such a discretion are likely to be very low in self-worth themselves. Comparing yourself to others may be involuntary, it often happens before you can stop yourself, but that doesn't mean you have to lie about it.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY:

- Trusting only certain people with your secrets, or taking time to get to know someone before becoming vulnerable and open in their presence, will slow down your ability to connect. Focus on building up inner strength so you have nothing to hide, by revealing it all to people piece by piece over time, as you build your confidence.
- Comparing yourself to other people and perceiving them to be either better or worse than you is a subjective fiction; it's OK to not be the best. Just be honest.
- Don't suppress shame and feelings of inferiority, you *can* talk about them. Keep in mind that a confident person is also a shameless person, so the simplest way to love yourself more is to express yourself more.

KEY ACTIONS

- Tell a secret to someone you *don't* trust, just to practice handling your feelings and their reaction.
- Each time you compare yourself with other people, focus on being more honest about it as a way of building respect for yourself. Learn to replace 'winning' with integrity.

The Hidden Faces of Dishonesty

"The most common lie is that which one lies to himself; lying to others is relatively an exception."

Friedrich Nietzsche

Everyday Dishonesty

Because your mind doesn't want to acknowledge your dishonesty, it hides the truth behind rationalized explanations. In this chapter, we're going to reveal a few of these hidden faces of dishonesty to ensure that you aren't fooled by them. Prepare to feel some resistance, as many of the points I'm about to make in this chapter may challenge some long-standing beliefs and patterns of behaviour that you've been holding onto.

Politeness

From a very early age, we are told that there are things that we can and cannot say to certain people, based on a context we find ourselves in. *Politeness* is a set of guidelines about what is and is not acceptable to be expressed in a given situation — the rules of the social game. What is considered to be polite changes depending on the context, audience and culture, but it usually means this: when you're around someone who 'outranks' you socially (e.g. a family elder, the boss of the company) or someone who is not yet considered a 'personal connection' (e.g. a business partner, the waiter at a restaurant), you must reduce your honesty to the level of a superficial and pleasing conversation, to avoid upsetting that

person. Anything outside of this range of pleasing conversation material is considered 'impolite'.

Think back to every shitty birthday or Christmas present you've received from a relative who obviously doesn't know much about you. Remember how you felt compelled to say "Thank you" anyway. You had to pretend to be grateful despite not genuinely feeling it. Is this honesty? Think about how often you've avoided interrupting someone because you didn't want to be rude and then ended up never saying what you really wanted to say. When you ask your work colleagues every single day about how their morning is going, do you genuinely care? And when they ask you the same thing, do you always give a positive answer even if it means lying right to their face? Perhaps you just say it because you've *always* said it and because you're *supposed* to say it. Perhaps you almost never really mean it.

Remember that bullshit your parents and caregivers taught you: *if you don't have anything 'nice' to say, don't say anything at all.* Translated, that means: "If you think others will be upset by you being honest, just deceive them instead." Notice how often you keep truthful thoughts, feelings and beliefs to yourself because you don't want to be perceived as impolite (i.e. negative, disrespectful, threatening, awkward, annoying, or inappropriate). Observe how much truth has to be sacrificed in the name of niceness and politeness.

Politeness is a fancy term given to the lies that supposedly maintain social harmony. Most expressions made with the intention to avoid rudeness are probably going to be fake, and not representative of what is truly going on inside of you. You may argue that it's genuine for you to be polite, simply because you've always been polite — it's 'who you are' — but repeatedly telling a lie doesn't make it true. If I always hide my true feelings by pretending to have more acceptable emotions, does that make the pretense real? Of course not. It just means you're consistently dishonest because you find social disharmony more uncomfortable than being a liar.

To be fair, politeness generally falls on the lower-harm end of the dishonesty spectrum: you do it mostly for yourself, and others know what's happening and aren't hurt by it. Nonetheless, it is a form of dishonesty that can prevent you from building confidence, having

necessary confrontations, and creating meaningful connections. Later in this book, instead of politeness we will look at combining honesty with compassion. We'll explore how you can express yourself without any deception, yet still care for people as they receive your honesty. For now, just ask yourself a question: is it better to be polite or honest? Because you can't be both.

Being Nice

What does 'being nice' mean to you? Think about everything you do under the banner of being nice. It ranges widely from person to person, but generally we see a theme of people-pleasing behaviours that are likely to provoke a pleasurable reaction, such as: helping without being asked, keeping conversations light and humorous, agreeing and preventing confrontations, giving only positive feedback, calming people down and cheering them up, and self-sacrifice. Whenever we're able to manipulate someone away from one of the 'negative' emotional states like anger, stress, confusion, fear, or sadness, into one of the positive emotions, like happiness, we label our behaviour as 'being nice.'

How *honest* is your niceness? Reconsider how genuinely generous your 'nice' behaviour is, and whether you are doing it to improve the quality of life for others or if you're simply trying to enhance their view of you. Do they know the *real* reason you're being nice? Do you? If you were raised to be nice, have you stopped to reassess this long-standing behavioural pattern to check if it is as altruistic and as genuine as you hope it to be? Is this more about them feeling good or you avoiding uncomfortable emotions yourself?

We use nice behaviour to manipulate others toward feeling a pleasurable emotion which they will then link to us, making them like us more. Yet we don't openly tell them that this is what we're doing. We shrug and smile, and allow them to believe that we are simply generous with no self-serving motive. Being nice was my weapon of choice for most of my early life. I leveraged it to make people approve of me, often by using it to prevent and avoid confrontation. And, let me tell you, it worked like a charm! But, of

course, I didn't realize that I was using niceness to *control* people — I just thought I *was* nice.

News flash: everything you do is self-serving. This doesn't mean you're 'selfish' — which would be more about failing to acknowledge or respect others — but it does mean everything you do is primarily intended to serve your own needs, such as to fulfill your desperate desire for love and approval, or to maintain a practically helpful persona and reputation. Even when you 'sacrifice yourself' for someone else, you're doing it for an internal reward of some kind. Maybe it's so that you can tell yourself that you're a good person. Maybe it's for the pity and respect others give you in return. Maybe you even enjoy the pain and martyrdom of self-harm. One thing is for sure: whatever benefit they're receiving is secondary to *your* gratification.

Now, there's nothing wrong with having these motives, especially since they are natural and therefore unavoidable, but are you being honest about them? After being nice, do you tell someone, "Hey don't thank me, I just did it to make myself feel good"? Or do you allow them to mistakenly believe that you are somehow pure and holy? Do you secretly expect them to show gratitude for your heroic kindness? Do you demand reciprocation from others, despite already secretly receiving the juicy reward of pride and satisfaction from within yourself?

Being nice appears throughout the entire spectrum of dishonesty. It can range from a mild, unconscious drive to make everyone feel calm, through to deliberate, narcissistic manipulation that severely harms others. Often, people feel pleasurable emotions after you're nice to them, however they can also feel controlled and pressured to reciprocate. Being nice doesn't guarantee that you're improving other people's lives, and it can often mean the opposite. Making someone feel good now so that you can pressure them into doing things for you later, as if they owe you a debt, is hardly a nice thing to do, yet this is exactly what most people do in the name of niceness. People will be nice to their date while expecting sexual reward; bosses will be nice to their employees while expecting unpaid overtime; parents will be nice to their children while expecting obedience. None of these expectations are directly stated: they're kept hidden, like the small print on a dodgy

car lease. Doesn't sound all that nice, does it? It sounds more like *emotional extortion*.

The real harm of being nice in the way described above is the catastrophic damage it does to *your* self-confidence. Look at it in this way: I've created an entire business based on helping people recover from the destructive impact that 'being nice' has wreaked in their lives. I've seen it cause divorces, career crashes, suicide attempts, existential despair, and even strokes and heart attacks. In this book, instead of being nice we will look at *honest generosity* — giving for the sake of giving, rather than to manipulate someone for instant gratification. When you combine being genuinely kind with honesty and courageous assertiveness, you'll be a much nicer person overall than someone who tries to use niceness as a weapon.

'Getting to Know Someone'

This is the nice-sounding label we generally give to the beginning phase of a new friendship or romantic relationship. It sounds respectful, curious and giving. We think of it as carefully peeling back the layers of an onion; the ever-increasing revelations of depth between two people as trust and love grows between them over time. Yet, in reality, it represents a prolonged performance: a pretence we use to avoid discomfort, embarrassment and rejection. When we 'get to know' someone, we aren't actually focused on allowing them to see us for who we really are. Not right away, at least, and sometimes not ever. Instead of connecting deeply, we merely put on a dishonest performance for each other while slowly dishing out morsels of truth over time.

We feed each other a calculated amount of true information over time, hidden within piles of fiction and superficial noise, making sure to be very, very careful not to scare the other away with too much disclosure. And they reciprocate, like a dance between mating swans, since in response they only allow us to see a carefully moderated version of themselves. Whenever the truth is deemed as dangerous to the safety of the relationship or our reputations, it is either hidden, watered down, or outright replaced

with a lie. 'Getting to know each other' is often nothing more than two fictional characters performing to gain each other's approval, with tasty pieces of truth occasionally thrown in (usually by mistake or with the support of alcohol).

Seems like a reasonable approach though, right? Surely a person can't handle the *whole* truth, we think, so it's only fair to ease them into it. Yet this process can take a long time. Sometimes weeks, sometimes months, and most often, years — and that's assuming you even come to the full truth at some point. That's a *lot* of bullshitting. And let's say, after years spent getting to know you, the other person finally concludes that they don't like the real you. If you had shown it right away, both of you would have lost only a few hours instead of years. What have you stolen from them and lost yourself? How many missed opportunities have passed them by because their attention was riveted on your fake performance? How much of your own time was wasted in needy pursuit of a pointless connection? How can you behave in such a deceptive way and still call yourself a 'good person'?

I rate the pretence of 'getting to know' someone as very harmful. You can steal an entire lifetime from someone with this act. And what about when you start to get lonely? Lessons learned from my own life, and the lives of my clients, show me that holding back on honesty reduces both the quantity and quality of the connections you have with other people, and as the years go by you'll start to feel ever more isolated. For many, being lonely is one of the most painful psychological states a person can experience.

Truly getting to know someone can take just a few seconds, not months or years, if you're willing to be completely open and honest. In this book, you will learn how to genuinely connect within minutes of meeting someone — by diving straight into the juicy, real stuff instead of playing it safe.

Working for The Money

When you engage in work or career activities you don't really like, it's often because you tell yourself that you 'need the money'. While

it might be true that you need money to purchase survival items (and even this is debatable), how honest is it to tell yourself that you need money from *this* specific job? And at what point did you come to believe that enjoying your work and making money must be two separate things? Is accumulating a 'safe' amount of money really more important than enjoying your life? That doesn't even make sense.

You'll have your reasons. You'll have a big list of reasons why you *must* work at your current job. Even though you would leave your job in a heartbeat if you won the lottery, somehow you convince yourself that this specific job is important and must be maintained at all costs. You have convinced yourself that trying to find something more satisfying is 'impossible' right now. There may even be times where you willingly sacrifice your integrity for this job, which is another way of saying that you sacrifice who you are for money.

You might tell yourself stories about how your survival depends on this paycheck, and how your kids will starve and your partner will leave you if you don't bring in that money. There's the story about how you don't have enough time to find something else, even though every person on the planet has the same amount of time each day (the amount of time it's taken you to read this chapter is more than enough to apply for a new job). There's the story about how it's part of a long-term plan for a future reward, despite the fact that there is no guarantee that you'll even live to see tomorrow. Then there's the story about how the job isn't *that* bad, and your workmates are kind of OK, and you're lucky to have a job in this economy, and all that crap.

Deep down, right at the core of your being, you know it's a big load of bollocks. How do you know this? Because you're forced to justify it *to yourself*. If this was really the job for you, you wouldn't need a big song about why you need to stay. The answer would simply be, "This is my calling; there is nothing more rewarding that I could do with my time right now." No further explanation required. But instead you have the thing with the money and the time and the obligation and the OK workmates and all the other dishonest excuses you hide behind to avoid your fear of change.

I rate working for money as a high level of harm on the dishonesty spectrum, even though you aren't deliberately intending to deceive

or hurt others. The suffering of a life not fully lived can be directly attributed to your career above nearly anything else. Simply put, if your daily work isn't meaningful, your life probably isn't either, even if you find meaning elsewhere (e.g. family), because work usually takes up the majority of your time. Also, by staying in a career position you hate, you're depriving someone else of that job, someone who might *love* it. In this book, instead of working for fictional outcomes like money and safety, we will explore what it means to work for a reason: how to give purpose and meaning to your work and how to redefine why you do it in the first place.

Apologizing

Jeez, don't even get me started on apologizing (we'll explore this in much more detail later in the book). Every time you say "excuse me" or "sorry," you're taking responsibility for the way someone else feels and you are claiming ownership of the way the universe works. You're either pretending to feel regret for your actions because you are trying to be polite (i.e. you're not really sorry), or you're expressing regret for knowingly causing harm (i.e. you're only sorry that you got caught), or you're genuinely feeling regret for something you had no control over (i.e. you're apologizing on behalf of fate). All of these are examples of deception or believing something untrue.

If you accidentally bump into someone while walking down the street, do you say "sorry" because you feel genuine remorse, based on clear, reliable evidence that bumping into them was a harmful event? Or is this an automatic, reactive language-pattern that you don't think to question? Why are *you* the one who bumped into *them*, rather than it being them bumping into you? For you to be at fault, you would have to claim you have full control of the cause-and-effect chain of both of your lives leading up to the point where you bumped into each other. Are you God? That's quite some power you got there!

What about when you *deliberately* hurt someone, or do something that you knew had a high chance of creating harm? How can you

honestly apologize for a purposeful action? You did it because you meant to do it, so pretending you regret it is just a lie. Perhaps you didn't realise that your actions would cause quite as much harm as they did, and only after the fact do you feel regret. Well, regret is one thing, but saying "sorry" implies you didn't mean to cause harm at all, when you knew reasonably well from the beginning that someone was going to get hurt.

Now I know what you might say (since I've had this argument many times): if you feel bad and have 'caused' harm, saying "sorry" is a term of respect; you're showing the other person that you regret your behaviour, which may be truthful expression of how you feel, and you'd like to make them feel better. However, as we'll explore later in this book, verbally apologizing is very different from living with integrity by genuinely making amends through reparative action. A verbal apology is usually just a tactic to relieve your own emotional discomfort while getting the aggrieved party to forgive you and approve of you once again. Most of the time, you apologize to get them to forgive you, manipulating them into relieving your guilt for you.

For now, I'll just say this: apologizing is either unconsciously dishonest politeness, or it's a cop-out to avoid putting real effort into making things right. Either way, it has elements of dishonesty woven throughout, which means you're building up shame. You're either pretending to not feel apathetic towards the 'victim', or you're taking shameful responsibility for something that you did not actually control. In the end, it all leads back to reduced confidence. Simply put, a confident person will either make amends when she causes harm or will give responsibility back to the party actually at fault, but would have little use for the word "sorry" either way.

Apologizing is low harm while it happens, but can be high harm in the longer-term, especially if you are a person who habitually apologises without conscious reasoning. The more often you say "sorry" just for being yourself and existing, the more you feel you're not good enough as a person. Apologizing can destroy *self-acceptance* — a crucial element to confidence. In this book, we will look at how to replace the above-mentioned forms of apologizing with active reparation. You can redeem yourself by repairing the

harm you accidentally cause (as a natural by-product of existing), rather than avoiding responsibility for it by hiding behind a "sorry."

You're Not Alone...

We all do this stuff. Every human on the planet is at least a little bit untruthful in the way they express themselves. The highly subjective nature of truthfulness guarantees that you will slip from honesty, at least occasionally. This is the first truth you must face on your path toward integrity: in your attempt to be genuine, you will sometimes be false.

We are all just humans. It's hard enough to be a human to begin with, let alone to be an honest one. We've all been taught that it's OK to be dishonest, preferable even, by our parents and school teachers to make us easy to manage; by our bosses to achieve their targets; by our friends to feel in control; by sales people to take our money; even by our partners to avoid rejection. You are surrounded by people influencing you to be dishonest, because they are afraid of what they'll have to deal with if you start speaking the truth.

Why are we afraid of the truth? Probably because it hurts like a bitch. When we express ourselves truthfully, we are forced to face the consequences, and so is everyone else. The truth doesn't care about civil harmony, feeling safe, social acceptance, comfortable emotions, and quick-fix successes. Being truthful often rocks the boat socially, creates risks, generates painful emotional states, and delays gratification. We're so damned afraid of these consequences, but I believe we don't need to be, and in fact should not be. These 'costs' of honesty are actually benefits that enhance our social lives over time, but are only realized once you start allowing them to happen.

This book explores a simple concept. We are going to look at what it means to be *fully* honest, and experiment with the idea of living with integrity regardless of the social risks. We will have a look at what happens in people's lives when they choose the truth over popularity, safety, comfort and quick results. We're going to find

out if being truthful is a more rewarding way to live than pursuing external and ephemeral rewards. Is honesty really the best policy? I think so. Let's see if I'm right. I don't know how being honest will affect you, but I do know how making the change to start living more truthfully affected me:

It gave me a meaningful life.

KEEP IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Facing how dishonest you are is the first step — and it's OK to feel guilty about it and resistant to change.
- Politeness, being nice, taking a while to get to know someone, working for money, and apologizing are all versions of being at least a little dishonest.
- We are all at least a little bit dishonest, and we lie to ourselves about it. Your friends and family do it too — just watch them closely and you'll see it happen.
- Being honest will be difficult and imperfect.
- Your quality of life will be enhanced over time by increasing your honesty, if you're willing to experiment.

KEY ACTIONS

- Look back over the sub-headings in this chapter, and write down examples from your own life of how you slip into these frames of dishonesty (e.g. how do you behave differently when you're getting to know someone, compared with how you express yourself around closely trusted friends?)

Green Light Syndrome

"It's easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission."

Grace Murray Hopper

What Are You Waiting For?

Green Light Syndrome is a term I created to describe one's need to first seek signs of approval and permission before doing something that might make people feel uncomfortable. It's not just about situations where it's obvious that you should first ask for permission, like before taking a day off from work or giving someone critical feedback. Green Light Syndrome applies more to situations where there are no clear 'rules' to follow, like when expressing ourselves honestly, asking for something we feel afraid to ask for, and taking a risk that others feel hesitant about. When it's an unfamiliar situation, and there's no one around to flash the green "Go!" signal, we freeze and we wait — neglecting the values of courage and leadership. In what follows, I will focus specifically on the relationship between Green Light Syndrome and honesty.

Have you noticed that you seem to wait for permission before speaking a controversial truth, or doing what you believe is the right thing to do? If you're like most people, the answer is actually No — you haven't noticed — but you have been doing it nonetheless. Green Light Syndrome is subtle, which is what makes it so harmful. A common example is the way people will ask a question when they really want to make a statement, like asking "What do you want for dinner?" with the hope that they'll hear "Chicken," rather than just saying "I want chicken for dinner." Every week, people go about their lives almost completely unaware that they spend a large portion of their time waiting for a signal of permission before they say or do what's true for them.

Take a moment to examine your life. Where are you waiting to take action? Do you notice a delay between wanting to do something and following through on it? Do you apprehensively assess your listeners before deciding whether to speak your mind? Look carefully at these situations and try to explain *why* you are waiting, and whose permission you're seeking. Your mind will say things like, "It's just not the right time," or "It will cause too much drama," or "I can't afford it right now," or "I want to be considerate and respectful". In these excuses, you will start to see a pattern: you are waiting for *guarantees* of success and safety before you proceed. It's not about someone literally saying, "You now have permission," but rather a more subtle sign of approval or encouragement that you can move forward without getting hurt.

What you're really seeing is fear holding you back, in order to avoid disapproval, failure and rejection. You're like a child waiting for her parents to say "Yes" before you go out to play with your friends. You're carefully scanning body language, looking for cues on what's 'appropriate' for the situation you're in, and always measuring reactions to get a better sense of what you're 'allowed' to say or do, and what you aren't. This puts you in a passive, follower position. You're constantly waiting for someone else to *lead*.

What Green Light Syndrome Looks Like

When I worked with criminal offenders who were released after serving long sentences in prison, I started to notice a pattern. The longer their sentence, the more deferential and respectful the guy would be towards me. I can't tell you how bizarre it was to have gang-affiliated murderers twice my age calling me "Sir" and asking politely for my permission to have a glass of water. These massive tattooed blokes — some of whom had hurt more people than an ebola outbreak — were meek as mice when asking for what they wanted.

This effect is commonly referred to as being 'institutionalized.' I later learned that I was seeing men who'd been *conditioned* to ask for

permission. For many years, sometimes multiple decades, these guys needed permission to do anything, from leaving their cell to eating lunch to taking a piss. Sometimes they weren't even allowed to *ask*: they just had to wait until someone else decided for them. Once they left prison, they were unable to shake off this compulsion to wait for permission before taking action. In the presence of an authority figure, some couldn't even speak without first being spoken to. They'd become programmed, through reward/punishment mechanisms, to need a 'green light' signal from an authority figure before they could feel safe to do what they wanted to do.

After a while, I started to realize it wasn't just parolees doing this weird permission-seeking thing. I saw my colleagues at work waiting to be encouraged by their managers before applying for promotions. I saw my friends waiting for a sign of attraction before asking someone out on a date. I saw family members impatiently biting their tongues until someone else brought up the issue that needed to be discussed. I saw drivers hopelessly stuck when the traffic lights stopped working, unsure of who should go first. Time after time, I noticed people demonstrating an inability to engage in a risk-taking action or truthful expression, without first receiving an approval signal from an authority of some kind, someone they had decided was the leader.

How Green Light Syndrome Affected Me

Of course, the most painful realizations for me only occurred when I turned my curious gaze inward. I started to see Green Light Syndrome showing up everywhere in my own life. I was constantly checking with my boss before making any move that was even slightly outside of the box, and often checking on things that I had already received permission for, just in case something had changed. I would almost never 'make a move' on a girl I liked unless she had somehow already directly demonstrated that she clearly and undoubtedly wanted me to (and even then she would usually still have to initiate before I felt safe). I wouldn't even start a new

workout program without first trying to gain approval from some fitness expert, or my friends. Progress in my health, wealth and relationships were all subject to seeking permission from others. I simply couldn't be totally honest without someone else opening that door for me.

Where this held me back, most noticeably, was in the social world. I felt like I couldn't talk to someone I found interesting unless I was introduced first, or had a 'good reason' to talk with them. It simply wasn't good enough that I merely *wanted to*. I felt like I needed a reasonable excuse, something that would guarantee non-awkward conversations. Without that, I couldn't find the courage to follow through on it (unless I got drunk). Recently, at a party, a friend disclosed to me that he cannot socialize without alcohol. He said that he needs beer to 'give him permission' to socialize. He's frozen by the inhibiting mindset he experiences while sober. He is the same as I was, the only difference being that he relies on getting drunk whereas I waited for peer-approval and support (while also getting drunk).

Where Green Light Syndrome hurt my ego the most was in the bedroom. After many years of subtle and not-so-subtle influence from third-wave feminism, I had come to believe that nothing sexual should ever occur without me first receiving a full declaration of permission and agreement from the woman: namely, in the form of her directly initiating sex and doing all of the risk-taking and decision-making. I was so scared of accidentally pressuring a woman beyond consent that I subconsciously concluded that it would be best for me to simply never do anything remotely sexual, even to the extent of remaining passive during sexual activity!

I assumed that I should just remain platonic until the girl made a more sexual move. Under the banner of 'consent', I completely avoided taking any initiative — I used the fear of being seen as sexually inappropriate as an excuse to passively force women into being the leader.

And what was the result of this waiting-for-permission strategy? A *decade* of being unwillingly single, with most of that time spent in a desperate sexual dry-spell. You see, there is nothing wrong with wanting to ensure that a woman I slept with was consenting, of

course. The problem was my unwillingness to provoke a *withdrawal* of consent. I feared her saying "Stop" or "No" because I would interpret this as being a sign that I'd already crossed a forbidden line — that it was too late. Unfortunately, because my strategy for coping with this fear was to be sexually passive, all the women in my life incorrectly assumed I only wanted to be friends with them. Everything about the way I acted was platonic, which was a behavioural lie given the attraction I felt. I missed out on many years of connecting positively with women, and would suffer almost every night as I lay awake with confusion and regret, torn between the pressure to connect intimately and the fear of getting rejected.

Why Should This Matter to You?

I see other people take a similar passive stance under the banners of 'respect' or 'politeness'. We refuse to engage or take any risks, which manipulates everyone else into doing the heavy lifting and risk-taking on our behalf. Some of you will resonate with my experience, while others will see parallels within different contexts in their own lives. You'll see yourself avoiding the risk of a "No" by making it impossible for rejection to happen, yet you'll also regret the missed opportunities this cowardly and dishonest behaviour steals from your life. One of my clients procrastinates on publishing her documentaries because she's afraid of getting negative feedback. One of my friends avoids sharing her financial success because her family is judgmental about how much people earn. And I see dozens of good dancers miss out on dancing with professionals because they're waiting for a signal that it's OK to ask.

What missed opportunities keep *you* awake? How has Green Light Syndrome reduced your integrity and therefore lack of new, positive experiences? You'll probably never know for sure, but you can guess. Perhaps you will realize it when your dream girl gets a new boyfriend because you were waiting to make your move. Perhaps you will realize it when the kiss-ass from work gets that promotion because you were waiting to be invited to apply. Perhaps you realize it every time you lie awake in bed wishing you had just

spoken your mind but it never seemed to be the 'right' time.

Hopefully it's obvious how Green Light Syndrome causes suffering, but in case it's still unclear: it means the loss of the freedom to live and express yourself honestly. It's the secret cause of most of the 'unfairness' in your life — you simply wait too long to speak and act. The stream of time is constantly flowing. The opportunities in life are floating along and they wait for no one. Every hesitation caused by waiting for permission means less options, and yet you're worried that not getting permission will reduce your options. You miss out because you're scared of missing out!

Autonomy is the freedom to make choices of your own volition. It means that in any given situation you have complete control over your decisions, however limited the range of options may be. Even in a prison cell, you can choose to whine and complain or you can make the most of your time with some exercise and reading. For every second of every day you are responsible for what you do. It's no one else's job to give you a green light to live with integrity. Other people may limit your options, but they can't limit your ability to choose from the options that remain and to act with initiative. They can instruct you to wait for permission but they can't *make* you wait.

Green Light Syndrome undermines your freedom, and severely limits your already limited options. Fear tells you that you can only speak your mind or do what you feel like doing *after* any and all risks of harmful consequences are eliminated. Your mind will constantly predict and simulate the consequences of your anticipated words and actions, and if you have Green Light Syndrome you will feel forced to wait until the simulation comes back as "safe and certain." And because you believe that these risks are controlled by external forces, your mind must wait to be given an external sign that you can move forward.

Have you ever stopped to consider how flawed this logic is? How can you possibly get a "Yes" to a question that hasn't been asked? Do you really believe that people are carefully watching you for subtle clues that you give out about what you want, so that they can constantly guide your decisions? Do you feel like other people have been assigned the role of Honesty Approval Officer and have been

given power of authority over your right to speak and act? Nope. They're too busy waiting for permission from others themselves!

The universe doesn't care about your unspoken desires and hidden expectations. These might torment you every day, but they are a low-priority to everyone else — no one is looking to guess what you want and hold your hand through the initiation process. Someone in your past may have held your hand before, like a parent who fights their child's battles or a friend who passes on your love note to your crush, but in the real world you're going to have to do all this stuff yourself if you want full autonomy. There will only ever be one right time to act honestly: Now. There's your permission, from now and forever.

Now I know what you're thinking: "What, so I should just recklessly do or say anything, anytime, just because I feel like it and without consideration for other people?" Well, not exactly...

Finding the Sweet Spot

At the frightened end of the caring-what-others-think spectrum, we have Green Light Syndrome at its most extreme form: the passive wimp who never says or does anything honest without first getting a big thumb's up from an authority figure. At the opposite end, we have the narcissist: the inconsiderate psychopath who blasts ruthlessly through everyone's lives, leaving a trail of misery and destruction behind him as he does whatever he pleases without empathy or sympathy. As the old saying goes, "The opposite of crazy is still crazy." The trick here — as so often is the case when it comes to building confidence — is to leave this spectrum of craziness altogether and do something completely different.

You can repair the damage you might cause by 'crossing the line', providing you lead with compassion. There will be many honest expressions and actions where you won't get the STOP signal until *after* someone feels hurt or upset. Almost always, you must act first to be told "No." If you want to live honestly, these situations are inevitable — it's only a matter of time before you provoke

resistance and rejection. This is where a considerate yet honest decision-making blueprint can be helpful.

The 3X Model of Honest Expression

Firstly, using curiosity, figure out what you *really* want to say or do. You can listen to your emotions to know the answers. If you feel attracted to someone, then it means that you should express your attraction to them. If you feel excited about the promotion at work, then you should apply for it. If you feel passionate about your beliefs, then you should challenge those who oppose them. It's pretty simple.

Secondly, use honesty to express what you feel, but without any attempt to make it work in your favour — just express yourself for the sake of being honest. This is the part where you need to go ahead without permission, to break the Green Light Syndrome spell. This might mean saying "Hi" to the attractive person, or asking your boss about how to apply for the promotion, or saying "I disagree" when someone speaks against what you believe in. There may be no come-hither sign of attraction, no invitation to consider the promotion, and no one asking for your opinion. Don't wait for a green light, do it anyway. Throw yourself out there. Take a risk!

Finally, to balance any potential 'harm' caused, use respect to allow people a right-of-reply to your expression or action. This allows you to break the rules and go for it but without being narcissistic. You may provoke someone's pain when you take honest action without waiting for permission, so to balance this out you need to give people a chance to react before you steamroll ahead into the next move. Express yourself boldly and unapologetically, but then give people time to react and respond, allowing you to be honest without becoming an overly-dominant psychopath.

State Your Intentions

A simple technique to break out of Green Light Syndrome is to practice simply stating your intentions. This is like sending up a signal flare, warning those around you that you want something, and giving them the chance to react to it with initial feedback before you plow forward. This is very different from passively waiting for approval or encouragement. Even if you're worried about how painful a rejection will be, you are now going to blatantly, honestly and directly warn them of your intentions, rather than waiting for a sign.

I was so worried in my youth about sexual consent that I would be painfully indirect when stating my intentions. If I wanted a girl sexually, I would just sit near her, or laugh at her jokes, or tell her I agree with one of her ideas. Not exactly the clearest signal that I'm horny for her, right? I would then wait for a response that clearly said, "Go ahead, proceed further." But the only response that could make me feel safe enough to move forward was one where she initiated sexual contact. And, of course, I only received such signals rarely, even when the girl was horny for me (I've since discovered that I missed dozens of subtle invitations).

However, when I eventually learned how to state my intentions directly, I not only allowed for sexual connection to be initiated, I also *reduced* the risk of accidental harassment or assault. When I said to a girl something like, "Look, if we hang out any longer, I'm probably going to try and kiss you," there was no room for a misunderstanding. She had the freedom to say "No, thanks" without needing to wait for me to cross the line first. This is different from either waiting for her to initiate or forcing her beyond her comfort zone. I was now leading and initiating, taking the risks for both of our sakes. This is what leaving the unhealthy Green Light Syndrome spectrum looks like.

After you assertively inform your boss, "Hey Jill, I'm dead keen on that promotion, I'm going to apply for it," or when you tell the bigot, "Bro, I'm going to have to challenge you there: what you just said goes against my beliefs," you give them a chance to digest this warning and react accordingly. You're still planning to move

forward — you don't need their permission for that — but you're also compassionate and aware of how this might affect them. You're initiating without needing permission, but with full respect of the impact you might have. It's bold honesty followed by deep respect.

If you do end up making a mistake — if the girl says, "I'm not interested in sex with you" or your boss says "Yeah, there's no way I'm going to let you apply for that position" — at least you now know for sure there isn't permission (as opposed to Green Light Syndrome guesswork). Now you have a clear Red Light, and you can adjust to this feedback. You can now choose to either just be friends or move on from the girl. You can quit your dead-end job, without regret and "What if?" scenarios haunting your dreams. You can walk away from a pointless argument.

Ironically, going ahead without permission is attractive, in all senses of the word. It shows confidence, honesty, openness, respect, leadership, and inspirational bravery. A potential partner will be more likely to feel horny and safe if you respectfully show assertiveness and honesty, your boss will be more likely to hire someone who's willing to risk rejection in order to go for something important, and your philosophical opponent will be more likely to respect the argument of someone who is unapologetic for their stance while simultaneously understanding the resistance to it.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- You are probably waiting for permission to act or speak honestly, without realizing it.
- Waiting for a 'green light' only leads to regret and resentment.
- Full honesty requires taking risks, particularly provoking other people to show disapproval.
- You don't need to harm people to take the initiative; you can do so with respect and compassion for their reaction.
- If you're still unsure on whether to take an action, tell people about your intention directly, allowing them to have an initial reaction before you move forward.

KEY ACTIONS

- This week, practice stating your intentions. Try telling people what you are planning to do, or simply what you wish you could do. Tell people what you want — without waiting for them to ask.

The Familiar Zone

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

The 'Comfort' Myth

There is a huge barrier to living honestly, one so subtle that for most people it flies completely under the radar, and it was a big topic in the first book of this trilogy, *Nothing to Lose*:

Emotional comfort.

Commonly referred to as 'staying in your comfort zone', this is a place where there's an absence of pain, challenge and fear. It's an enticing place: we can see many people spending large amounts of their time there, like the cloned twins zoning out on soma in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. But what is the comfort zone, exactly?

When solving any problem, first you must clearly define it. I've already implied that becoming a more honest person will require you to leave the proverbial comfort zone. But before we even look at why we should leave our comfort zone, or how to do it effectively, we must first define what the comfort zone is. What does it mean to be *comfortable*?

I would like to challenge the idea that the comfort zone is somewhere actually comfortable — physically, mentally, spiritually, or emotionally. Sure, occasionally we can experience a semblance of measurable comfort, such as the feeling of lying on a sofa and having a nap. But most of the time the so-called comfort zone is a decidedly uncomfortable place to reside. It's a place renowned for *numbness* and *suffering*.

In my early twenties, living in *my* comfort zone meant coming home every day from an easy job that I hated, smoking weed and eating snacks while I psychologically numbed myself in front of the television until dinner time, then smoking some more weed and eating snacks in front of the television until bedtime. Then, on the weekends, I would spend my days doing basically nothing of value, then drink myself into oblivion in nightclubs and bars that I didn't even want to go to. Comfort meant pretending everything was OK. It meant shying away from effort and difficult decisions. It meant avoiding confrontation or challenging social interactions and intimate relationships. It meant disrespecting my body and my health. It meant busting out the same old approval-seeking social performance day after day, lie after lie.

This was often somewhat physically comfortable, but every night I lay awake with chronic insomnia, and a sense of dread would slowly overtake me. I would frequently fantasize about my life being different, about connections and passion and freedom. At first, these fantasies were pleasurable to indulge in, but gradually they began to hurt because they reminded me of all that was missing in my life. Each day I would awake to my alarm and immediately be struck with anxiety as I fought a brave struggle to avoid calling in sick for my shit job. I would get stomach cramps and urgently need the toilet whenever I entered an unfamiliar social situation, due to the nervousness and the pressure that I always felt while trying to put on a positive social performance: what I liked to refer to as *The Dan Show*. And I avoided mirrors because I didn't want to acknowledge the state my body was in after years of sugar-bingeing.

It doesn't really sound all that *comfortable*, does it? Sure, it was easy, simple, and physically effortless, but the price I had to pay made the whole experience psychologically miserable. My coaching clients often report similar disappointments with their attempts to remain comfortable. The comfort zone is an empty hole created from neediness, regret, worry, loneliness, numbness, guilt, self-loathing, boredom, and a fear of missing out. These are uncomfortable states to be in, which is why we drown these thoughts and feelings with busyness, alcohol and drug abuse, porn addiction, binge-eating, compulsive social media scrolling, and surrounding ourselves with shallow approval-seeking relationships.

If seeking comfort means not actually feeling all that comfortable in the longer-term, then what is so appealing about the comfort zone? Why do we constantly go back there? Why do we use it as a place to hide from the pain in our lives that is actually generated from going to the comfort zone in the first place? If we wish to become more honest, these are questions we must answer, because integrity does not reside in the comfort zone.

The Familiar Zone

The 'comfort' we seek is not about feeling comfortable physically or emotionally, it's more about creating a sense of *familiarity*: the perception that we 'know' the situation. You don't stay in a shitty job, boring relationship, or unhealthy lifestyle because it *feels* comfortable. You don't hide your emotions from your friends, work colleagues and dates because you enjoy shallow and meaningless connections. No, you do all this simply because it's familiar. You know what to expect and how to manage yourself within the situation. You feel safe in following the unwritten rules, even if doing so is physically or emotionally painful. You'd rather feel familiarity than actually enjoy your life!

So, let's begin by redefining 'comfort' as being simply a state of *knowingness* that comes from our frequent visits to *the familiar zone*. Seeking comfort is not really about achieving a pleasurable feeling, it's about an avoidance of the unknown, the unfamiliar. We see the confusion, pain and failure associated with the unfamiliar as somehow 'wrong', and the comfortable sensation of knowing something as 'right'. We want to be successful, so we constantly try to maintain or recreate that feeling of knowing, often by simply avoiding or resisting anything unfamiliar, e.g. being vulnerably honest.

We believe that experiencing familiar comfort is a measure of success, despite the overwhelming contradictory evidence we see every day. We think that being a celebrity actor is the highest status a person can attain because their fame and wealth appears to create endless comfort, yet we choose to ignore their suicides, visits to drug rehab, and revolving-door divorce scandals.

We think that not having to work hard for what we want is the ultimate achievement — to be an unchallenged expert making passive income — yet we see the misery that people go through when they actually live in a safe, familiar way, such as morbid obesity, stressfully unsatisfying careers, drug addiction, existential depression, and lonely social lives.

We are raised to believe that our efforts are a temporary struggle toward the goal of *never having to make an effort ever again*. We try to create a life where there is no more unknown — a final resting place with nothing but familiar comforts. School is aimed at preparing you for university, which is aimed at getting you a financially safe career, which is aimed at allowing you to save for retirement. So finally, by the age of sixty-five, you can finally stop *doing stuff*. In other words, you can finally stop putting effort into living. From the beginning, we are taught to strive for the end — the zone of total familiarity and, therefore, comfort: no matter what the costs are in terms of our integrity.

Lottery and other gambling institutions thrive on this addiction, as people try to get that Big Score to fast-forward to retirement and the end of honest effort. Take a minute to look at the toil you put yourself through, this *effort to end all effort*, and ask yourself: "Is the thought of doing *nothing* really so appealing?" Have you truly and deeply considered what it would be like to live without any effort at all? Does being 'yourself' mean comfortably sitting around all day watching life pass you by, knowing everything and never being challenged?

When you explore this more closely, you'll see that those who have achieved what appears to be endless comfort and familiarity are faced with something that is far more harmful than the uncomfortable unknown, something that shatters their dreams and expectations about achieving an effortless life. Instead of feeling an ongoing sensation of happiness, like they were taught to expect, they experience something else entirely:

Agitated boredom and restless dissatisfaction.

Why is it that many celebrities, millionaires and other recipients of seemingly endless comfort still suffer from depression and drug

abuse, commit suicide at the heights of their careers, and drag themselves through disastrous relationships, just like all the rest of us? Why do they never seem completely satisfied? To quote fictional rockstar Tommy Hanson, from Ben Elton's *High Society*; "So what do you do when you have it all? How can you top that? Well, you take drugs, of course."

Do you remember how painful it was to be bored as a child? I would get restlessly anxious and bug my parents to give me something to do. But, of course, because I was already being brainwashed into believing the dangerous lie that comfort is the ultimate achievement, I automatically reacted with stubborn resistance to any suggestion they made that required discomfort, effort, or facing the unknown. I would be both bored and yet unable to cure my boredom; stuck in a ruthlessly helpless state, simply because comfort didn't deliver the goods like I was promised it would.

The familiar zone is comfortable, so when you believe that *comfort equals success*, you become trapped in a kind of hell: an impossible dilemma where you can never be satisfied. You can't push yourself and grow because anything scary or painful is automatically perceived to be bad, so you avoid it. Increased honesty is always unfamiliar, so that's the area of life you're most likely to neglect. Yet, if you only engage in things that are familiar, you end up building a miserably *un*comfortable life. New levels of honesty are uncomfortable to explore, so if you won't allow yourself to be uncomfortable then you have no choice but to live dishonestly. A dishonest life is filled with shame, missed opportunities, fear of being exposed, low self-respect, superficial relationships, endless social pressure, and soul-crushing boredom. *Comfortable?* Hardly.

Discomfort and Confusion

We can see that 'discomfort' is therefore mostly about stepping into the unfamiliar. Throughout this book, we'll try to change your perception of discomfort: we will look at it as a *necessary* feeling that you'll experience while taking practical actions to be more honest. But first, I'd like to emphasize that while discomfort may

include unpleasant feelings (both physical and emotional), the most effective way to leave your familiar zone is through doing something that is likely to cause you *confusion*. Discomfort, particularly in relation to being more honest, is really about wilfully engaging in a truthful expression or action where you don't feel like you really know what you are doing.

For much of your life, you were probably conditioned and pressured to believe that you need to know what you are doing. You were taught that experiencing confusion meant that there was something wrong with you. When you ventured incorrect answers at school, you weren't praised for trying, instead you were punished for 'failing'. When you didn't know how to ask someone out in high school because you'd never done it before, your peers mocked you. When you failed your first driver's licence test, your parents were disappointed in you. Week after week, your friends, family and other authority figures conditioned you to believe that confusion was akin to failure, and that meant you were bad and wrong.

The distance between you and your integrity is bridged through uncomfortable and often confusing attempts to express yourself. Essentially, discomfort is about trying something for which there's no guarantee of success, or where even a failure won't be what you think it is. You can't be sure that you'll do it *well*. Discomfort means moving forward with a high risk — or even a complete certainty — of total failure. Leaving your comfort zone is about welcoming painful emotional states as a necessary consequence of learning. It means willingly choosing to be confused; to be seen as a beginner and a student again, and to let go of what you currently believe to be true. To start with no clear end in mind. Simply put: to choose honesty over quick and easy success. Discomfort is about accepting the unknown and welcoming it into your life by taking an action that invites or provokes uncertain emotions to arise. Not only should you accept failure, risk and confusion, but actively seek these out for the sole purpose of building your integrity.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- We think 'success' is about endless comfort, so we chase the familiar because that feels immediately comfortable.
- The familiar zone is the place where you already know everything and there's no pain, challenges, or surprises. There's also no growth.
- To maintain familiar comfort, you must avoid being more honest, so in seeking comfortable success you'll inevitably build a dishonest life and personality over time.
- If you can learn to accept the unknown — represented by painful mental and emotional states like confusion and fear — you can grow and avoid creating a life that's uncomfortable in the long-term.

KEY ACTIONS

- Describe *your* comfort zone — what actions do you regularly take simply because they're familiar? What new things do you avoid because you don't know exactly what to do? What dishonesty must you engage in to maintain your comfort zone (e.g. doing a job you hate, hanging out with people you must perform for, pretending you'll start eating healthy next Monday)?

The Fears That Bind Us to Dishonesty

"You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. What you'll discover will be wonderful. What you'll discover is yourself."

Alan Alda

Why Don't We Enjoy The Unfamiliar?

Ultimately, if we're at least honest with ourselves, we can admit that the one *real* reason we're ever dishonest is because honesty makes us uncomfortable. We often think that 'uncomfortable' is synonymous with 'unpleasant', but is this true? When you're frustrated while trying to learn something new, do you not also enjoy the process of learning overall? I do. When I'm learning how to do a handstand, or trying to solve the riddle of coaching a new client, I'm often frustrated and yet simultaneously I'm enjoying the task at hand. I'm confused and uncertain, yet I don't mind feeling that way — indeed, I actively seek these situations out when I could have easily avoided them. In these situations, I associate 'discomfort' with growth, discovery, learning, progress... and most importantly, fun!

However, in other situations, like while trying to learn the Czech language, I see myself avoiding change and learning because I associate the very same discomfort with pain, failure and humiliation. In principle, learning a new language is not all that different from learning to do a handstand, yet I react with avoidance and procrastination rather than passion. Why would I be happy to go through the discomfort of figuring out how to balance upside down and yet shy away from the same type of mental discomfort when it comes to practicing my new Czech skills? Why is the

handstand context deemed to be OK for discomfort while learning Czech is not?

When I explored these contradictions, both in my own life and in the lives of my coaching clients, some common fears showed up that seemed to separate the discomfort that is welcomed from the discomfort that causes disgust and avoidance. We'll explore these fears to see if they also apply to you. We are not looking to resolve these fears, just to *understand* them. As you read through, consider how they show up in your own life, and build awareness of the real reasons you engage in various forms of dishonesty.

Fear #1: The belief that an unknown future is worse than the familiar present

People avoid leaving their familiar zone, even if it currently sucks, because they fear that what they might find will be even more painful than their current situation. They also fear that they will not be able to come back to their familiar zone if they leave it — that the door will be locked behind them forever if they dare to explore alternative possibilities. For this reason, many never start something new, something they honestly want to explore or express, but instead learn to tolerate a sufferable yet familiar long-term situation.

Kelley[17], a BROJO member, once told me that she can't quit her job to find a better one because she's afraid that not only will there be no better jobs, she'll also never be able to come back to her current job. She was even scared that she'd be fired for even looking at other jobs. Even though her current job was awful, Kelley's mind fictionally concocted an *even worse* scenario — her never finding work again and ending up begging on the streets — which compelled her to avoid the 'future is even worse' fiction by tolerating her crappy situation. This is another example of how

17 Name changed for privacy.

we can lie to ourselves without requiring even a single piece of evidence: Kelley can be afraid of homelessness despite having never experienced it nor even having heard of a single person who has become homeless from simply entertaining the idea of looking for a new job.

Believing the fiction her mind imagined about the unknown future made Kelley feel like there is no point in even looking for another job, despite the fact that simply searching for another job comes with no risk or obligation. When you notice yourself refusing to even investigate other options, you know this fear is controlling you. There's rarely harm in doing some research, like looking at other jobs, seeking new partners or friends, or trying new hobbies. Yet if you refuse to even *look* at the options, it means that for some fictional reason you've already decided it's not worth it. You've decided this without any evidence that the future may be painful while there's already plenty of evidence that your current situation is already painful!

I see this kind of mindset a lot when I work with clients around their personal relationships. Every week, I get a bunch of emails from people complaining about having an unsatisfying sex life or a shallow emotional connection with their partner, inferring that it's a deal-breaker that will "ruin the relationship" if it's not resolved. What blows my mind is how often I hear from these same people years later, complaining about the same problem. It's not uncommon for me to end up coaching someone who's thrown away more than five years on a relationship that was becoming unsatisfactory after just three months of dating.

You may assume that there must be something else going on that would compel them to stay together, like maybe they have children together, or complex intertwined finances, or even a deeply satisfying love beyond the specifically stated issue. But the sad truth is that, in nearly every case, they're with someone they see as an average partner at best, and there's no reasonable excuse to stay. The partners they complain about are often passive, unloving, disloyal, or simply uninteresting. Not only does their partner not take charge in the bedroom, he or she also doesn't connect emotionally, doesn't stand up for the family, doesn't talk things

through or deal with confrontations, or doesn't even help with the housework. Worst of all, in nearly every case, the offending partner refuses to engage in dealing with these issues. I offer all these partners a free coaching session — most excuse themselves out of it or simply don't respond.

You may judge these people. Why would anyone stay with a partner so mediocre and unfulfilling? Are they stupid, or what? Actually, no. Many of them are generally loving, intelligent and socially capable. The real issue is that they are held back by fear, and by the *sunk-cost fallacy*: the misconception that something has value simply because you've invested a lot into it or held onto it for a long time. They're afraid that being single will last forever, or that their next partner will be even worse, so they tolerate a mediocre or terrible partner for years, complaining all the while. They also tend to avoid directly confronting their partner about the offending behaviour, knowing that such honesty might end the relationship.

Before you judge them, look closely at your own life. Where do *you* keep investing in something that you know is not good for you? Where do you tolerate mediocrity because you're afraid of trying something new? Where do you lie to yourself about lacking the ability, time or energy to explore new opportunities, when the truth is: you could get started right here, right now? How often do you complain about someone behind their back without challenging them directly, because you'd rather be comfortable than honest? How often are you dishonest simply because you've invested in the lie?

Fear #2: The Belief That This is As Good As it Gets

When we try something new, like more honestly expressing ourselves, we open ourselves up to the imminent risk of 'failure'. The fear of failure is common, and seems obviously present in most people. But deep behind this surface-level anxiety lurks a subtle yet even greater fear, the one that asks: "What if there is *only* failure?" While we might be OK with a few bumps on the road toward

success, what if the bumps turn out to be impenetrable walls of solid, never-ending failure without hope of success? As unlikely as this might seem when written down, many of us believe that we're *permanently* doomed when it comes to real-life challenges in unfamiliar situations.

Many people I know hold themselves back from taking a risk because they're afraid that the result will be more than a single failure: they are secretly worried that they'll uncover confirmation that they can *never* succeed — some sort of undeniable proof that failure was the only thing waiting for them. This probably comes from a long-term pattern of taking failure personally, thinking "There's something wrong with me" instead of "I just need to improve my technique." Essentially, we fear that our last shreds of hope will be destroyed by evidence if we try. If we don't try, we can always hold onto hope and possibility, the "maybe one day" fantasy of success. We are terrified that if we try and fail it will prove that we never stood a chance. The dream will be destroyed and all hopes forever terminated.

If I don't ask that girl out on a date, she can always remain a "Maybe." There will always be a hypothetical chance she could say "Yes." However, if I actually ask her out, there is the risk that she will say, "No fucking way, ever." Goodbye to that hopeful maybe! And, worst of all, it possibly means also saying goodbye to the hope that *anyone* will *ever* love me (remember the discussion we had on Toxic Shame?). Many people would rather die hoping for love than take the risk of somehow confirming that no love exists for them.

I believe that due to the lack of critical-thinking training in primary and secondary education, we grow up affected by cognitive biases without realising it, and end up learning to make massive assumptions about likelihoods for our future based on limited experiences. As Daniel Kahnemann shows in his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, humans are terrible at estimating statistical likelihoods. We tend to view single 'failures' as representative and global, like the conclusion: "If one person doesn't like me that means no one does, or ever will." We'd prefer not to confirm such a horrific fate, so we avoid looking for any evidence whatsoever. This avoidance of the truth is an urge more commonly known as *feeling uncomfortable*.

If what we truthfully want to express or do 'feels wrong', we simply don't do it — no questions asked — so that no scary evidence is irrevocably discovered.

Some of us want to hold onto the hope of change more than we want to actually improve our lives. We tell ourselves that we're 'lucky' to be in the situation we're in, even when it's obviously unsatisfying and painful, and then we proceed to guilt-trip ourselves for wanting more. This hope and promise of change somehow occurring in the future is simply a lie to hide the truth: that we're afraid to take action now lest we accidentally stumble upon irrefutable evidence that we're *not good enough*.

We fear that confirmation of this terrifying 'not good enough' concept is out there, waiting to be found, and we need to avoid it by not failing, which is achieved by not even trying to express ourselves at all. The result, of course, is that we have no success, so we end up *guaranteeing* the not good enough story that we're so afraid of! If we were instead to regularly try (and fail), at least we'd give ourselves a chance. With honest expression, you can at least transform the 'not good enough' narrative into 'not good enough *yet*'.

Fear #3: The Certainty That I'll Be Embarrassed

As I often say, we are the descendants of social pussies and we are upholding their legacy. To avoid embarrassment, we often engage in *the chameleon effect*: we unconsciously mimic each other and conform, allowing us to survive socially by 'fitting in'. *Embarrassment* is an emotion almost entirely unique to humans, and it seems to serve a single function: to push us into conformity. We only feel it when we're caught being 'weird', and it strongly urges us to stop that weirdness by mimicking others. Unfortunately, our brains are still wired to suit a completely different and much more competitive social environment from thousands of years ago[18], and we need to move on from this extremely outdated mindset.

18 Gilbert, *Evolution and Social Anxiety*, Psychiatric Clinics, Volume 24, Issue 4, (p723 - 751)

We blame society for pressuring us into conformity, and thereby abdicate responsibility for our dishonesty. We believe that we will be socially punished if we are seen by others as being unacceptable, which includes being more honest than is comfortable for people to hear, being caught feeling confused and uncertain, or being seen as failing in our attempts. Many of us choose to remain dishonest and unimpressive in order to avoid this risk of disapproval. We then put ourselves into a victim-mindset by claiming that other people *cause* us to feel this way — that the threat of embarrassment is holding us back.

Take another look. Who is *really* holding you back, and how exactly are they doing this? You may feel restricted or censored, but you'll find there's often no evidence to support this feeling. Sure, there may be people in your life who are occasionally discouraging or argumentative, but do they literally stop you from expressing your truth? Or do they just react poorly? This is a significant difference. If someone is literally oppressing you with physical force, that's one thing. However, if all that these people are doing is causing you to feel embarrassed, and they don't have any real control over you, then you must take responsibility for your decision to hold yourself back.

There is some substance to this fear. In New Zealand, for example, we have a pervasive yet intangible cultural phenomenon called *Tall Poppy Syndrome*. This is where people get cut down socially and made to feel embarrassed for trying to stand out in some way; individuals get punished for trying to leave the herd. I've seen this while being in a metal band. If we are the unknown band at the gig, no one will cheer for us or join the mosh pit, even if they enjoy the music. They wait to see if anyone else is supporting us first before they'll offer support. It's like they're embarrassed to back someone or something that might fail, and they won't make a move without first seeing social proof[19]. No one wants to be the first to show interest, in case they get embarrassed by association.

Bystander effect is a well-documented psychological phenomenon. Studies show that the more people there are available to help, the less likely it is that anyone will help[20]. For example, if someone falls

19 'Social proof' is a marketing/psychology term for how we believe in or like something (or someone) more if it appears that other people already do.

20 Karakashian et al., *Fear of negative evaluation affects helping behavior: The bystander effect revisited* (2006)

down on the street and there are only five people nearby, one person will probably help. If that same person was to fall in front of one hundred people, everyone assumes someone else will give him a hand and so he would probably be left to die. It is hypothesized that one reason for this withdrawal of integrity is the fear of being embarrassed. Like most people, you'll think: "But I would definitely still help in that situation," yet research clearly shows that you probably wouldn't if the crowd was above a certain size, and the situation was a little more potentially uncomfortable (like telling someone they have water stains on the front of the crotch), unless you're an exceptionally confident person.

We'd rather risk someone else's life than get embarrassed! The thought of going to help the fallen person, only to discover that they don't want our help or that it's a prank of some kind, and to then have spectators laugh at us is enough to prevent us from speaking honestly or living by our other core values. We avoid speaking our minds, starting a business, asking someone out, or trying pull ups at the gym, because we'd prefer to miss out on opportunities rather than risk social disapproval. We choose social acceptance over honesty. And let's face it: we probably do it simply because embarrassment just feels yuck.

This drive to contribute to social harmony is incredibly powerful. Embarrassment is the emotional warning sign that you're taking a risk in stepping out of line with society's expectations. I could ask you to imagine being eighty years old, lying on your deathbed and regretting all the things you missed out on because you were trying to avoid embarrassment and disapproval, and yet even if this exercise pumped you up to be more authentic, you'll probably keep on avoiding the risk of humiliation by being dishonest!

Integrity Means Facing Your Fears

The point of this chapter is simply to increase your awareness around the fears that stand between you and integrity. Overcoming these fears is a huge theme in this book, and facing them honestly is a good start. Yes, you do bow down to social pressures, irrational

negative fantasies, and the needy desire for self-preservation in the social sphere, but we *all* do this. It's our duty to overcome these temptations of comfort. You will face these fears as you continue with this book. It won't mean that you have to do anything impossible or even high-risk, it'll just mean experiencing a few moments of increased emotional discomfort each week while words come out of your mouth and actions are performed by your body.

You'll be OK.

KEEP IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Outdated fears keep us trapped in a pattern of avoiding discomfort. However, discomfort is *required* for integrity and growth, so we constantly miss out on meaningful experiences.
- The first fear that you need to face is the illusion that a shitty present situation is better than seeking (and possibly failing to achieve) a better situation.
- The second fear that you need to face is the irrational Toxic Shame belief that your life cannot possibly improve at all.
- The third fear that you need to face is the desire to avoid embarrassment and public ostracism.

KEY ACTIONS

- Identify a situation you're currently in that you don't like, and spend thirty minutes researching alternative options. No obligation, just have a look at what else is out there.
- Get rejected for some small thing (e.g. ask for free extra fries with your burger) just to show yourself that attempting to improve your life won't kill you.
- Go to a public place (e.g. a shopping mall) and randomly lie down on the ground in front of people for at least ten seconds, just to prove that doing something other people think is weird won't kill you. Another fun option: go to a book store and ask if they sell books. When they say "Yes," pull a disappointed face, say "Thanks anyway," and leave the store.

Saying Goodbye to Familiarity

"Turtles are very stable and have been around forever. But they have problems adapting. When humans came along, turtles came under serious threat."

Linus Torvalds

"OK, So How Do I Leave My Familiar Zone?"

The self-development industry is rife with the old cliché of 'getting out of your comfort zone'. You're often advised to "lean into your edge" and "push your comfort zone" and "face your fears." A lot of people talk about doing it, yet few can explain in simple terms *how* to do it. You're going to need to understand what it means to choose discomfort if you hope to increase your honesty, so let's dive into the practical application of this concept.

The most effective way for building self-confidence is through increasing your honesty while allowing yourself to set reasonable limits as to how much *courage* you can expect from yourself (i.e. how much extra discomfort you can handle in this moment). This is the most direct and effective path to creating both ongoing confidence and the ability to live with integrity. The more honest you are, the more you'll know who you are, as you'll see the 'you' that is being expressed. You will be able to sort between false and real 'you', by measuring your expressions against your belief-system. 'Being yourself' is not a frozen, static state; it is a constant learning process that gets regularly updated, informed by courageously uncomfortable attempts to be honest that are measured and refined. It is cyclical: you try to be yourself, you

learn from the attempt, then you try again but with increased awareness.

It's about accepting and welcoming calculated risks into your life by trying to be more honest through your words and actions. While this may often be uncomfortable, leaving your comfort zone is not necessarily about *trying* to make yourself feel uncomfortable. It's more about welcoming the possibility of the unknown, through failure, confusion, rejection, doubt, wild emotional reactions, disappointment, and frustration. Not just accepting or tolerating these painful experiences but actively seeking them out — *making them happen on purpose*. I believe that with the right amount of exposure you'll learn to enjoy these experiences over time (e.g. I now look forward to having confrontations even though they were once my greatest fear).

There is a mental adjustment required for this. When you notice yourself saying things like: "But what if it goes wrong?" you can reframe that and instead say, "Let's find out if I can handle it going wrong." There's an approach I take when leaving my familiar zone, inspired by the movie *Fight Club*: I seek to destroy any emotional attachments I have to comfortable familiarity. I want to destroy my fears, limiting beliefs, untruthfulness, suffering, unhealthy relationships, neediness, my tendency to take things personally, and cowardice. This approach was, and still is far more productive for me than seeking comfort through constant rewards, achievements, and 'good' feelings, which always just ended up stressing me out and putting too much pressure on me to perform. Ironically, I feel more comfortable seeking discomfort than comfort!

Rather than facing your fears to 'overcome' them, seek instead to deliberately provoke your insecurities through being more honest, merely to experience fear until you're so experienced with fear sensations that you no longer find them uncomfortable. Rather than trying to impress other people or avoid disapproval, seek as much public disapproval as you can handle, so that you become shameless. Rather than running away from the unfamiliar, run into it until it becomes familiar, and then seek the next unfamiliar thing to run toward.

Breaking New Ground

The simplest way to leave your *comfortable familiar zone* is to do something new that you feel uncertain about. It only needs to be something you're a little unfamiliar with, or slightly uncomfortable doing — preferably both. Increasing how honest you are is the best way to create this experience, especially if you aren't sure it will go well for you. Do it simply for the sake of experiencing uncertainty: to become OK with not knowing and not winning and not being approved of by others. Do something like that once per day for a month, and just notice how much your confidence grows.

I know that it seems counterintuitive to deliberately fail in order to build confidence. Try looking at it in this way: 'success' usually means *you played it safe*. This isn't a 'bad' thing, but it just means you took a slightly easier route, and too much of this will make you complacent, fragile and outdated. Sure, you can say the same old lies and half-truths that get a good reaction, but a real win is breaking out of this cowardly pattern and saying something new and bold. If it's comfortable, don't call it a success.

Discomfort Doesn't Have to be Unenjoyable

Does it sound like I'm saying that you must be miserable to become more honest and confident? Such pessimism is simply a side-effect of your belief that discomfort is 'bad'. Throughout this book, I'm going to show you how choosing calculated discomfort — through manageable doses of increased honesty and bravery — can be fun, exciting, interesting, motivating, educational, adventurous, peaceful, and satisfying, and will help you build endurance, anti-fragility, meaningful relationships, increased wealth, higher levels of impact, and all the other things that you currently think are represented by feeling comfortable. Hell, even a bit of embarrassment can help you enjoy life more in the longer term, because it creates better life stories and helps to relieve shame!

As a toddler, you instinctively expressed your honest feelings without giving a fuck about what any spectators thought of you. Somehow, over time, as your attempts to be honest became ever more scrutinised and judged by people close to you, and therefore uncomfortable, your confidence got buried by bullshit comfort-seeking beliefs and behaviour. Therefore, through this book, you are not learning 'how to be yourself' as much as you're going to *re-learn* it. I'm going to walk you through the process of weaning yourself off your dangerous, fragile, and unhelpful addiction to comfort, so that you're free to be honest and live with integrity.

Together, we are going to explore concepts like honest expression, courageous action, and valued living — all of which are likely to create emotional discomfort while simultaneously increasing your self-confidence. Through these we are going to let go of the outdated belief that a constantly comfortable life is good, and replace it with the idea that honest expression and participation is what a good life is all about — even though these things don't always bring on an instant reward. Simply put: it's time to speak your mind and take bold action, and some of it might not feel good right away.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Your biggest barrier to honest expression and living with integrity is trying to keep everything familiar and safe.
- Choosing discomfort regularly is how you generate true self-worth, particularly through honest acts, because it helps you build faith in yourself to handle the unknown.
- Choosing discomfort means simply doing a new thing that you are not familiar with, and being slightly more honest than usual is the best new thing you can do.
- When you learn to take action for the sole purpose of enduring discomfort (i.e. building your mental and emotional resilience), you'll develop the strength to handle anything.
- Keep it small, manageable and frequent — one thing per day, just for the sake of feeling uncertain.

KEY ACTIONS

- Choose one thing to do today simply because it's unfamiliar and uncomfortable, like taking up a new hobby, inviting someone you don't really know out for lunch, or recording yourself singing loudly.

Giving to Get

"No one has ever become poor by giving."

Anne Frank

The Battle with Neediness

Another way to frame the pursuit of familiar comforts through dishonesty is to say that you try to *get* comfort. You're needy for it. You view familiarity and comfort as needs that you must fulfill, by any means necessary, even if that means using dishonesty and indulging in other breaches of your integrity. Basically, you try to feel as good as possible, and resort to lying and other forms of deception to achieve this goal. You *take* from other people when you do this. You steal their attention, time, trust, love and energy with your manipulative performance to gain comfort for yourself. You allow them to believe untruths and potentially ruin their lives with these illusions, just so you don't have to feel confused, angry, rejected, embarrassed, and so on.

The need to smoke a cigarette is not caused by stress, habitual patterns, or peer-pressure. It is caused by *the previous cigarette*. Any smoker will tell you: they never needed a cigarette until after they had their first one. This is how neediness works. You aren't needy because you want to get something: it's trying to get something that makes you needy! When you use dishonesty to attain comfort and familiarity (e.g. approval from others), you create a need that was not previously there. Or, more accurately, you turn something from a *want* into a *need*.

You'll notice that receiving your reward never quite satisfies your hunger, so before long you feel the compulsion to get some more. No matter how often you pretend to be cheerful to make people happy, you feel the need to do it all over again the next day.

No matter how much approval, love, attraction or attention you get from putting on your dishonest performance, it's never quite enough to keep you feeling complete. No matter how much you get, you just end up hungry for *even more*. And what's scary is that the highs get dimmer over time. Once upon a time, a girl smiling at me for being nice would have kept me feeling good for a whole week. A few years later, a girl sleeping with me only kept me happy for about an hour. Like all drug addicts, the more we get, the more immune we become to the high.

Dishonesty is all about *getting*. You might tell yourself that you use dishonesty in order to give — like you're giving someone agreement or respect — but the truth is you're simply trying to get comfort and familiarity for yourself. You lie to reduce emotional conflict, to control how people treat you, to get property and possessions that make you more comfortable, and to keep things the same. The story you tell yourself about other people benefitting from your dishonesty — e.g. "I didn't want to hurt their feelings" — is just yet another lie, one you tell yourself to relieve the guilt of being selfish, needy and greedy.

Trying to get something creates neediness, and dishonesty is a form of trying to get something. Therefore, *dishonesty creates neediness*. Neediness is a sense of lack, like you're not good enough, like you're missing something important. So can you see the connection? When you use dishonesty to get comfort and other rewards for yourself, you reduce your own confidence by building up neediness. Feelings like frustration, loneliness and boredom are all symptoms of neediness, and the more you try to get, the more you'll feel this way... even if you do get it!

In this chapter, we're going to discuss how you can reverse this self-sabotaging cycle, by using honesty to *give* instead.

Honesty is A Gift

Honesty is the greatest gift you have to give, of this I have no doubt, because it's the only gift you alone can give. You being yourself

has never been done before, so it's fresh, interesting, valuable, and possibly highly influential. Honestly sharing *your* unique experience, wisdom and ideas with the world is one thing that only you can give. It's far more productive and helpful than you pretending to be something that you aren't, because people have been pretending for centuries and we've gained little from it. I hope to convince you that your honesty is a gift that not only serves others but also reduces your own neediness, and thereby increases your connections and self-confidence.

When you give honest feedback, you increase someone else's self-awareness. When you give an honest opinion, you let people see things from a new perspective and increase their wisdom. When you share your desires and preferences, you allow other people to connect with you, which reduces their loneliness while also allowing them to interact with you more safely and confidently. When you share any truth about yourself, you give yourself validation. Honesty is a gift.

Dishonesty, on the other hand, accomplishes none of these things. Dishonest feedback steers people in the wrong direction for growth. Think of all those people on *American Idol* whose families told them that they were great singers when they clearly weren't, leading them to suffer brutal public humiliation. Dishonest opinions misdirect people's judgments, which leads them to make poor decisions. If someone thinks you agree with them when you secretly don't, they might go on to make crucial decisions for their life based on a mistaken belief in your support. When you hide your desires and preferences, people never get to see who you are or what they might have in common with you. This makes it impossible for someone to genuinely connect with you, leaving both of you feeling isolated and alone.

You may already think of yourself as 'a generous person' despite also participating in frequent acts of dishonesty. Many people-pleasers, for example, consider themselves to be nice, kind and giving, and yet they are constantly being deceptive. And here's something even more common: you may have low self-worth, which prevents you from believing that your honesty could in itself be a gift. In the next few chapters, we're going to explore the value of Giving and how it relates to honesty. If you can learn to see the truth as a gift, it

becomes a lot easier to be honest. But, before we can genuinely give, we must face the dark truth about our desire to *take*.

The Illusion of Altruism

There is an illusion pervading our society that defies logic: the idea that it is possible to be 'altruistic' — to give selflessly, with no self-serving agenda or intention whatsoever, without receiving any personal reward of any kind. There will, of course, be different understandings and definitions of this word, but essentially most would agree that altruism describes an act of giving without receiving anything in return, a kind of self-sacrifice. People-pleasers in particular love to see themselves as altruistic, and use this term to disguise controlling behaviours as self-sacrifice. Take, for example, the overbearing mother who prides herself in "giving up my social life" in order to "spend more time with my children;" a behaviour that her children secretly resent (because her love is smothering them), and is really driven by an insecure desire to always keep an eye on them, to be seen by others as caring and giving, and to ensure that their behaviour makes her feel good about herself.

Putting it bluntly: altruism, as defined above, is impossible. Everything you do can be traced back to a self-serving motive, with the one possible exception of knowingly sacrificing your life to save another person (yet even this can be questioned, e.g. you're probably doing it to be remembered as a good person). The human brain is hard-wired with a reward and punishment system[21]; everything we do has a personal reason attached to it, even if that reason is not obvious or rational. Altruism is often the banner under which many people commit acts of dishonesty. Sometimes that reason is "for the greater good," but even this is about *being recognized as someone who contributed*, so ultimately is at least partly self-serving.

You're no different. Nearly everything you do is essentially decided subconsciously and you backwards-rationalize it to yourself. You do something that benefits *you*, but then you're immediately hit with

21 Burger, *Psychopharmacology. A Review of Progress, 1957-1967*, Journal of Medicinal Chemistry (1969)

guilt caused by socially-conditioned shame to not be 'selfish'. So you tell yourself that your actions were only beneficial to someone else. You construct a narrative for yourself as to why you chose to do it — a story that transforms the action from self-serving into altruistic giving. It's in the storytelling through which we attempt to change an action from being *selfish* to *selfless*. There's no shame in this, we all do it. Yet why we have decided as a society that we must pretend that we aren't self-serving is a mystery to me. It's through being self-serving that we adapt for the good of species! When you become shameless about your motives, you will be ready to truly give with honesty.

Honesty is primarily self-serving, but everyone else benefits as well. You don't need to lose so that others may win, and others don't need to suffer for your gain either. Honesty is like sunlight, it gives to all without losing anything for itself. It just spreads the truth around for everyone to use. Dishonesty is more like a black hole, sucking in everything and never allowing any value to escape. It takes and takes and takes until there's nothing left. Even the dishonest person benefits only temporarily, and after the high of 'winning' subsides there is only the gnawing neediness and loneliness that the dishonest person spends most of their time experiencing.

Odds are that you've been programmed to believe that doing a good deed comes with the condition that other people must benefit *more* than you do. It would be rare for you to receive praise and recognition for doing something which appears to only serve you, e.g. giving honest feedback that hurts someone's feelings. No doubt you've had moments where you've sacrificed your integrity and enjoyment of life to help another person, and then had an authority figure validate you for this 'altruistic' act. We often get rewarded for 'selfless' dishonesty, like pretending there's a Santa Claus to give children a sense of wonder. However...

Giving to Get

Underneath it all is your needy desire to *get* recognition and approval. You don't really tell the kids about Santa Claus to give them a sense

of wonder, at least that's not the only reason. You primarily do it in order to control their behaviour, fit in with the other parents and your local culture, and to be seen by others as a good, normal parent. These are all benefits to *you*. And the cost? Once your kid finds out there is no Santa, he will learn that you are capable of deliberately lying to him. Also, if he's one of the last kids to find out, he'll be humiliated by his peers. He may never fully trust you again. But that's OK as long as you fit in with the other parents, right?

In a 2009 study, parents reported lying to their children and considered doing so to be acceptable, even though they also reported teaching their children that lying is unacceptable.[22] So which principle would truly serve your children most: Santa, or honesty? Because it's hypocritical and confusing to teach them both. If you believe that giving to your children means teaching them to be honest, then the Santa Claus fiction can't be for *them*, it must be primarily for you.

Giving to get is when you use what looks like generosity and altruism as a tactic to extract a reward for yourself. You give in the same way a bank gives a loan: to be returned with interest. It's giving for a profit. It often flies under the radar because people are hesitant to challenge a person who appears to be giving, lest they be judged themselves. I find that most people use one of two 'giving to get' strategies, sometimes both, and thus become *approval-seekers* and *self-sacrificers*.

First, there are those who thrive on recognition and approval. They resent you when you don't give them positive feedback and appreciation for their acts of kindness, which may take the form of helping, entertaining, listening, advising, material gifts, and unsolicited support (e.g. cooking a meal you didn't ask for). Each act of 'giving' is essentially a loan — you must pay them back or you'll be considered as ungrateful and entitled. They live in a universe where everyone is keeping score and the balance sheet must even out at the end of the day. Their giving is merely a strategy to get positive responses. They would find giving anonymously to be uncomfortable, and would argue that giving to someone who does not show appreciation is "pointless."

22 Heyman, Luu, and Lee. *Parenting by lying.* Journal of Moral Education (2009).

And then there are the self-sacrificers, people who are uncomfortable receiving recognition and appreciation for their kindnesses, yet they are still not altruistic. These are the people who quietly bear the burden of extra work, unfair treatment, and waiting until last to choose their portion. They feel threatened by positive responses, like gratitude and compliments, because subconsciously they believe that if they feel rewarded for giving, then it didn't really 'count'. Giving must *hurt* to be considered good. These people prefer a more indirect karma-system — the belief that life will generally treat them well and give them what they want if they sacrifice themselves in order to benefit others. They're still doing it for a reward, they're just willing to wait a little longer to receive it. Or, in some cases, they believe that they don't deserve a reward, and punishment makes them feel more comfortable (which is a reward).

Confidently honest people — true givers — are a separate category again, because they don't *need* to receive anything at all. They give simply because it's intrinsically rewarding to give. They have no shame about feeling good for their giving, and that good feeling comes from knowing that they lived by core values aligned with their integrity. You don't have to appreciate their gifts, nor do they have to suffer while giving for it to be worthwhile. They will give you their honesty even if you don't thank them for it, simply because they know that the truth is more helpful than lies, even when it's uncomfortable.

I used to be uncomfortable when receiving recognition, even when I was trying to help people. I would get especially uncomfortable with people trying to pay me back for good deeds, even when I believed they should (e.g. someone trying to pay for dinner because I paid last time). I came to realize later that this stemmed from my belief that *a good deed does not count if I am rewarded for doing it*, since then it wouldn't be altruistic. I ended up stuck in a conundrum of desperately seeking approval and validation through helping and entertaining others (which often required me being dishonest), while pushing back on recognition whenever it came up, brushing off any appreciation like, "Oh it was no big deal, you'd do the same for me." Many people I meet are also trapped in this hellish loop. They are unable to enjoy their hard work because

they feel shame when receiving recognition. They also believe that in order to be a 'good person' they must suffer. This kind of thinking leads to feeling resentful and entitled to receive recognition for their goodness.

Before you throw this book in the fireplace (or drag it into a virtual trash can) due to outrage (after all, I've questioned how giving you are), let's look honestly at some of the reasons we feel compelled to commit 'selfless' social acts. Let's see if you are truly as altruistic as you would like to believe, because if altruism isn't really possible then it's time to ask: what is your motivation for giving? In the next chapter, we'll explore some of the real reasons for your generosity that are hidden behind the story of altruism.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- All giving is self-serving; pretending that it isn't is a lie.
- Most people sacrifice honesty in order to be *seen* as giving, rather than using honesty to actually give.
- There is a difference between truly giving, and giving just to get something in return.

KEY ACTIONS

- Identify the last few times that you were 'giving', and ask yourself honestly if there was a hidden motive behind it.

The Secret Intentions Behind Our Giving

"I can't tell you the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everyone."

Ed Sheeran

Validation

One of the most common motives for 'giving' is the rewarding sensation of being *validated*; getting external recognition for being a good person. This drives us to favour actions that get social approval, even if this leads us away from honest expression. 'Altruistic' acts are seen as those that are most often rewarded with happy reactions, popularity, respect, and recognition, since it is generally believed that an altruistic person is a good person, and we interpret these responses as confirmation of goodness.

Experienced managers know that if you want to motivate your team members, one of the simplest things you can do is to give them validation for behaviour you want them to repeat. If you dangle the carrot of potential approval in front of them, people will chase it like a hound on a scent. Ever since childhood, many of us have been chasing that sweet, sweet confirmation that someone else thinks we are worthwhile. It fills the 'not good enough' hole for a few precious seconds, and so we hunt out those rare moments of relief from self-doubt like hungry truffle pigs. Before too long, we become so obsessed with *feeling* good that we lose track of what it means to actually *be* good.

Often, people will seek validation for their altruistic deed *before* they even do it, in order to confirm their assumption that they are a good person, like telling people that you're planning to donate

money so you get appreciation for merely considering it. This is another form of the Green Light Syndrome we discussed earlier in this book. Some people are incapable of deciding for themselves what classifies as 'good' and so they test the waters by 'humble-bragging' about *possible* future altruistic deeds to see if it gets a good reaction. They then often don't even go through with it, having already been amply rewarded for just talking about possibly doing it.

If you feel reluctant to commit an altruistic act *anonymously*, then you are probably attached to validation: requiring a guarantee of external approval before you are bothered to give. Think of birthday presents: why do we insist on putting our name on the card? Why is it so important that the receiver knows from whom the gift came? They could enjoy the gift without that knowledge — in fact, the mystery would likely heighten their enjoyment. Whom is that card *really* serving? If you cannot give without putting your name on the card, so to speak, then it's not really *giving freely* but giving to get validation through appreciation.

People-pleasers' acts of giving are mostly motivated by receiving validation and/or avoiding invalidation (i.e. criticism and dislike). Nearly everything they do is carefully chosen based on the calculated likelihood of receiving a positive response. It is almost impossible for a dedicated people-pleaser to give anonymously, or to do what's right even if it will be unpopular. I'm sure most of us have been guilty of 'giving' only because we knew others would approve of it, without a more meaningful search into whether it was the right thing to do or whether we were genuinely motivated to do it.

Nice Guys, for example, love to play the pseudo-therapist role. Almost every girl they are friends with will come to them for advice, a sympathetic ear, and a shoulder to cry on. Nice Guys will sacrifice hours of their time, other opportunities to socialize, and things they wanted to do just for themselves in order to play the counsellor. They will tell themselves that they are the heroes — the only good guys out there who are willing to sacrifice themselves in order to protect others.

It is all complete bullshit.

In reality, Nice Guys *bathe* in the validation from these 'counselling sessions'. They get the compliments and attention they so desperately crave, and through repeating this pattern their toxic attachment to validation grows into a monster. They can successfully lie to themselves about their own motives, which is terrifying as a concept (what are you currently lying to yourself about? It's almost impossible to know). It keeps them trapped in a pattern that slowly deteriorates their self-worth by making them dependent on approval from others. Nice Guy giving is dishonest because they lie to themselves about the intentions behind it. It isn't giving, it's *extorting validation.*

In the past, the reliability of the help I was giving was pretty questionable because I was subtly influenced by my need to seek validation. I secretly desired most of the girls I counselled, so any advice I gave would likely have been skewed towards making them like me more, rather than serving their best interests. I was scared away from being brutally honest because it might potentially damage the 'relationship' I had with them. This caused me to stray away from the truth as I saw it, and instead I would often condone their self-sabotaging behaviours. I wouldn't encourage them to solve their problems without me, which would have served them far more powerfully in the longer term, because I wanted to remain the hero they needed to *rescue* them.

Which brings us nicely to the next unhealthy motive that we lie to ourselves about when we're telling ourselves that we are 'selfless':

Avoiding Rejection

Validation is a measurement of sorts, a kind of barometer. It tells us how likely we are to avoid rejection and total abandonment in the near future. If a lot of people validate your behaviour consistently, you'll start to assume that your social security is guaranteed, and this allows you to get some relief from the pressure of trying to avoid ostracism. Often, when people are engaging in acts of supposed giving, they are simply trying to score social status points and so have no issue with being dishonest in their giving. Most of

us view kindness as *an investment in being liked* — we're pushing the likelihood of rejection further away with every good deed.

One reason we shy away from putting our own needs first (by being honest rather than pleasing) is because self-service seems likely to lead to rejection. People often judge any act of self-service as no different to being selfish. We associate self-centeredness with harm to others and unfairness in general. You will tell yourself stories about how taking care of yourself is somehow bad, and conversely that if you are suffering it's probably good for the rest of the population. But in reality, most of us are just trying to be liked and not be disliked. That's it. And deep down, we know it. Ironically, your fake, point-scoring 'kindness' is about as selfish as an act can get.

If we develop and nurture a long-term identity of Good Guy or Good Girl with our peers, we feel delusional safety about our existence. We feel certain that if we can just get enough 'likes' on the board then we will have a secure social future. No wonder social media thrives on the thumbs-up rating system — this is a precise symbol of what most of us secretly crave.

Unfortunately, this plan to get likes by withholding honesty is massively flawed. Being nice doesn't score you points quite as well as you might think, and you probably already know this. Just take a minute to stop and reflect: how well is being falsely nice working for you, really? How deep are your connections? How strong is your self-confidence? How satisfying is your life? Often, in our needy attempts to get approval, we steamroll our 'altruism' and 'giving' into someone's life, whether they want it or not. The most obvious and common form of this is *giving unsolicited help and advice*, which is one of the most repulsive social behaviours you can engage in.

Insisting on Helping and Giving Unsolicited Advice

When we offer our support without being asked, we step into the realm of *helping without permission*. Think of the last time you gave

someone assistance that they hadn't specifically and directly asked for. Are you sure they wanted it? Why? Because they appeared to be struggling? Are you sure they didn't enjoy the challenge of being independent? Or was it because they thanked you afterward? Are you sure they weren't just being polite? Just because you think you're being helpful doesn't make it true. You yourself have often received unwanted help or advice and pretended to appreciate it, right? People will try to show gratitude for help even when it's unwanted, because we think we're supposed to appreciate any assistance. It becomes extremely difficult to know when to stop.

There's an experiment I often do with clients, based on something I learned from Dr. Robert Glover's book *No More Mr Nice Guy*: I challenge them to offer no help, advice or assistance of any kind *for an entire month*. Most people squirm even at the thought of being this unhelpful and 'selfish'. Yet when they try the experiment, they all notice the same result: nobody cares. Everyone in their life who is healthy and relatively confident doesn't need their help or advice, and are actually relieved when they take the pressure off by no longer forcing their way on others. The only people who end up complaining are invariably needy users and abusers.

Giving advice that no one asked for is nothing short of being judgmental. In giving unsolicited advice, you have made a massively judgmental assumption that: a) you know how this person should live better than they do, b) what they're doing is not what they really want to do, and c) they are incapable of solving their issues on their own. Imagine if all these assumptions are wrong! How could giving advice be altruistic if the other person did not want it enough to request it? Who benefits then? Only you. Why was it so hard for you to ask permission before giving advice, and to accept "No thanks, I got this" for an answer?

If you feel resistant about asking permission before giving help or advice, or if you feel like you are avoiding expressing the harsh truth when giving advice (because you're worried that the relationship will be damaged), then you are being truly selfish. You're allowing your neediness for approval to override the values of respect and honesty. If you truly want to help people, you will not move forward until they give explicit permission for you to help, you will

listen to their guidance on how they want you to help, and you will be willing to lose them forever if brutal honesty is what is most likely to help them in the longer-term.

Before we go on, take a second to notice that I have *not* said that any of this is 'wrong'. There is nothing wrong with seeking validation and avoiding rejection. Some studies argue that this is the very reason for your existence[23]; neuroticism disguised as altruism probably kept your ancestors alive. So instead of debating right versus wrong, allow yourself to explore whether you are being honest with yourself about your motives, and ask yourself if these motives are the most helpful ones available to create the life you want for yourself?

There may be a better way to help people.

Control Freak

Ultimately, giving to get is about *control*. We are raised by the schooling system to believe that we can control other people and other external results, therefore — with the right 'giving' strategies — we can guarantee our social success. Subconsciously, most giving is an attempt to control another person so you can get an outcome; it acts as an investment towards a result that you believe you deserve. If you make them appreciate you, you will reap social rewards. It is a weapon more than a gift.

We give to get recognition, validation and approval, often resorting to dishonesty in the process. Why? Because then we can control our social outcomes… or so we think. We believe that if we can give *enough* to make people like us and agree with us, then we can create a social environment where we feel in control, comfortable, and safe. This seems like a cause worthy of sacrificing our integrity. Unfortunately, this is a completely inaccurate assumption, one that can have increasingly painful consequences. Take a second to think

23 Gilbert, P., & Trower, P. (1990). *The evolution and manifestation of social anxiety*. In W. R. Crozier (Ed.), *Shyness and embarrassment: Perspectives from social psychology* (p. 144–177). Cambridge University Press.

about this: is any social status guaranteed long term? Has there ever been a famous person who hasn't eventually fallen out of favour with the masses?

We fear being out of control because of all the potential harm it could lead to, yet we rarely stop to examine the harm taking place right in front of our eyes, every single day, from being controlling and dishonest! Every day, you can clearly see unreasonable expectations, disappointment, and validation-seeking that is making people miserable. Not to mention all the minor yet unenjoyable experiences, like wading through small talk, straining through false-positivity, and struggling to express gratitude for help that was forced down your throat. These are all consequences of an inaccurate belief: that people (outcomes) can be controlled by giving.

We trust that people will remember and appreciate our good deeds, and we expect them to reciprocate, so we're constantly disappointed when this doesn't happen. We cause our own misery by refusing to accept reality. We get so lost in our point-seeking system of giving to get that we completely lose track of what we really want. We help others who don't even want it when we'd prefer to be doing something else, as would they. And for those of us who genuinely enjoy being helpful, our dishonest, cowardly strategies cause us to miss out on the opportunity to make a significant difference, the kind that can only come from being boldly honest.

There is No Scoreboard

No matter how good you are to others, there is no scoreboard. No one is tracking your goodness for future reward; the present moment is all that matters. People are constantly updating their risk assessments because we're biased toward pain-avoidance, which is probably why your partner remembers every mistake you've ever made yet seems to forget all the great things you've done for them. Well, the truth is that they didn't ask for half of those things, and even if they did, you're only as good as your last action. Read that again: *there is no scoreboard.*

You cannot control outcomes, but you have been tricked into thinking you can: through rare moments of coincidental rewards. Sometimes you do *appear* to control things, or you temporarily influence people with dishonesty, and this is the 'evidence' your biased mind uses to conclude that you should be able to control *all* things *all* the time. I hate to be the one to break it to you, but just because you won one race it doesn't mean you'll win them all. You can be the most controlling-through-giving person in the world and still end up with no appreciation. Then what? It's just you alone, without even integrity to fall back on. And if you're giving just to control and win outcomes, then you're not really giving at all: you're *manipulating*.

"So, What Should I Do Instead?"

All of this revolves around a central theme: most of us give to get something *external*. This traps you in a process that requires constant dishonesty, leading to an exhausting maintenance of your deceptions. The enjoyment of external recognition doesn't last very long, and you'll need another hit within a few minutes or hours of receiving the previous one. You're like a drug addict, focused only on the drug of validation, chasing a repeat of that first high… and all addicts will tell you that you will never get that first high back again.

I'm not trying to depress you or remove the reason for giving, or even for living; I'm trying to introduce you to a much healthier way to give and live. Instead of giving someone a birthday present so that they'll thank you for your kindness and thoughtfulness (validation), you can learn to give for the sheer joy of being thoughtful and generous (genuinely self-serving). You can learn how to receive validation *from yourself* through the very act of giving. Imagine a world where you don't need other people to confirm that you're doing the right thing. Wouldn't that be nice?

By chasing the high of external validation, you are set on a path that will *always always always end in misery*. No one has ever received approval for their entire life consistently, without exception. No one. You will not be the first person to achieve this! It's only a matter of

time before you get rejected harshly by someone you love or from whom you yearn for approval, despite all the good you've done. Hanging onto this giving-to-get system means you're just waiting to be crushed by the inevitable. And it also means you're basically being a manipulative, selfish jerk a lot of the time.

Have hope. There is another way of doing things. There is a way of validating yourself and creating satisfaction with who you are, without needing a pat on the back from another person. When you learn to understand that honesty can be your way of giving and participating in the world, you will realize that honesty will give you purpose and meaning in and of itself. If I'm working with someone who is suffering from depression or anxiety, to the point where they cannot find a purpose to exist at all, I guide them towards giving freely without expecting anything in return. This is a great starting point for anyone who feels off-track and out of place. In the next few chapters, we're going to explore this new, healthier way of giving.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Most people use 'giving' to gain approval, create a social debt, and control other people. Others use it as a measurement system for testing whether they are a 'good person' in other people's eyes. Neither approach is helpful for building confidence.
- If no one has asked for your help or advice, then it is not an act of giving.
- Chasing external validation is a one-way road to misery.
- Honesty itself can be a gift, which gives the truth to others while validating yourself. Everyone wins!

KEY ACTIONS

- Stop all forms of giving and helping for the next week, just to reset yourself and become aware of your hidden motives.

Giving Freely

"A gift consists not in what is done or given, but in the intention of the giver or doer."

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

Definitions

Before we dive into the somewhat complicated concept of why honesty is always a way to give value to the world, it's important that I first lay the groundwork with some definitions, as I'll be using words for which you probably already have your own interpretation.

'Giving' is a word I'll use to describe any act that provides value to anyone involved, something that increases one's quality of life, internally, externally, or both. Giving makes things better for everyone, while 'taking' usually makes things worse for at least one of the parties involved.

'Morals' are personal judgments about what is good and bad. This is different to 'values', which are the core intentions behind your behaviour and decisions. For example, I might have a value of courage, but believing that it's good for everyone to face their fears is a moral opinion. Values are your own personal guidance tools, while morals are judgments you have about how everyone ought to be.

Giving is About Honesty, Not Morals

Before you jump to conclusions, when I talk about giving and its connection to honesty, please understand that this has almost nothing to do with my own moral viewpoint. While I do believe it's 'good' to be giving and honest, that's not why I'm advocating for

it here. It does so happen that many commonly accepted moral viewpoints align with the concept of giving, but that's nothing more than a correlation when it comes to discussing the benefits of giving in these chapters. Simply put: in this book, giving is not about being morally good, it's about *an effective way of being honest for your own increased self-confidence.*

This chapter is not going to tell you to be a more giving person as a way of meeting the approval of society. No, we're going deeper: to understand how being more giving can heal many of the toxic, leech-like mental malfunctions that you are currently burdened by. We're going to look at how being honest is a gift of truth that you give to the world, and how dishonesty is the withholding of that gift. We're going to explore how giving and honesty work together, as well as how neediness and dishonesty work together.

Many people use gift-giving as a tactic to avoid being more honestly intimate, vulnerable or confrontational. People who struggle to say, "I love you" may instead give flowers or pay for dinner, preferring a more indirect, emotionally safer means of expression. Many cultures place more worth on giving materialistic gifts or superficial recognition than being honest and straightforward as a form of giving. While material gifts are not 'bad' in any objective way, this chapter is about recognising when being honest would be a gift of even higher worth.

Which is better for confidence and connections: a bouquet of roses, or a heartfelt expression of love? A substantial pay-raise, or helpfully critical feedback that enhances your long-term growth and development? A compliment on someone's new car, or recognition of their bravery?

Honesty is the gift of *your truth*; it provides people with a unique, in the moment, view that gives them the most accurate possible information with which to make their decisions. Honesty is the gift of *vulnerability*; it allows people to see who you really are. It helps one feel resonance and connection with another human being. Honesty is the gift of *feedback*; it shows people another perspective that can help them solve the pain caused by a lack of self-awareness. Honesty is the gift of *respect*; it gives people a chance to take responsibility for their lives rather than to be manipulated and maneuvered against their will.

In this chapter we will be exploring three claims: 1) honesty is giving, both to the speaker and the receiver, 2) for honesty to be a gift it must be freely given and not come with hidden expectations of a reward, and 3) honesty is a gift that's more valuable than superficial or material rewards.

If we can enjoy being alive simply through being honest, then we have total power over our enjoyment of life! But just how the hell do we give freely, without needing anything in return? How do we avoid the enticing lure of external validation? How do we give in a way where the giver is enriched without needing reciprocation or any return on their investment? *How do we make honesty a reward unto itself?*

Honesty is Your Unique Gift

Building self-confidence and loving connections is all about making the act of giving an honest expression of yourself. Rather than thinking of giving as something valuable that leaves you and goes over to another — a resource changing hands — we need to think of it as *a projection of who you are*, broadcasted out into the world. As many philosophers say, it's like being the sun — beaming out light and warmth to the benefit of others without losing anything itself. Ironically, it will feel like you must first believe in your worthiness before you can see honest self-expression as giving, yet it's through increasing your honesty that you'll start to believe in your worth! When you show what you really think, feel, want and believe, you'll validate yourself because shame only occurs from hiding. Self-validation *is* confidence.

You are completely unique. Your genetics, combined with a lifetime of social influences, ensure that there is no one else out there quite like you. You are a new mutation, and the best thing you can do for the human race is to be that unique individual — to affect the species and improve it through your one-of-a-kind influence. Whatever it is that you are, no one else can provide it to the world. When you pretend to be something you're not, you deprive the world of that gift.

If you have low self-worth, you will find it hard to believe that being yourself (i.e. being honest) is beneficial to others, but that is a miscalculation on your part. The most powerful learning experience I've ever had about the power of giving freely — sharing an honest expression to provide value without expecting anything in return — was when I was interviewed for *The Art of Charm podcast* with Jordan Harbinger. This interview provoked the largest positive response I'd ever received from a single piece of content, showing that what I'd said had been hugely valuable to others. Yet, I had no awareness of this during the interview — I was not focused on giving advice, getting clients, or even helping others. All I tried to focus on throughout the interview was being honest, and I found the conversation thoroughly enjoyable on its own. The response I later received showed me that being honest can be hugely valuable to others and rewarding to myself, without me trying to get anything or even trying to be of service.

Let's now have a deeper look into the different ways that you can practically apply being honest as an act of giving.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Giving means to provide value. If you expect something in return from the receiver, then you're not really giving, you're loaning.
- Giving freely means to provide value without expectation of return. Combining this with honesty is the recipe for high self-worth.
- Honesty is a gift because it is unique, only *you* can be *you*. Pretending to be someone else deprives the world of that gift.
- You won't believe honesty is valuable until after you practice being powerfully honest for a sustained period.

KEY ACTIONS

- Make a list recalling all the times that you being honest benefitted someone else, e.g. helpful feedback, sharing loving feelings, or allowing someone to feel less lonely by revealing your own insecurities.

The Inherent Value in Honesty

"It's discouraging to think how many people are shocked by honesty and how few by deceit."

Noël Coward

Recognition and Feedback

We already know that we can 'make' someone else feel good about themselves by complimenting them. However, this is often delivered in a shallow and meaningless way that only serves to condone their unhealthy attachment to external validation. If I say, "You look great in that dress," you might get a small hit of validation but ultimately all I've done is remind you that you're being judged on your appearance. You might rationalize this to yourself as, "Aw, it's so kind that he noticed me and made an effort", but deep down you're also starting to wonder, "Would he think I still looked good if it wasn't for this dress?"

Specific, targeted, and genuine recognition of someone's *efforts* is different to a shallow, materialistic compliment. When you give someone honest and thoughtful feedback (with their permission to do so), you're giving them the gift of seeing themselves through your eyes, hearing themselves through your ears, and experiencing themselves through your reaction to them. Giving powerfully transformational recognition and feedback requires you to look beyond the immediate sense of aesthetics and dive deeper into an accurate observation of the effect that person's behaviour has had on you.

It's about learning how to recognize your internal reaction to others, finding the helpful information within it, and then sharing that

insight with them. Rather than the shallow, forced act of, say, giving a birthday present, you instead look for the admirable qualities in people and then allow them to experience your perspective by boldly sharing what you've observed with them. This is a powerful gift. You might say something like, "I felt inspired when I saw you finally build up the courage to confront our boss, I wish I had the balls to do that." You can give recognition to the values that they have displayed which you genuinely admire.

Even 'negative' feedback will have a beneficial impact on someone's life. I once had a girl challenge me on how "pathetic" my self-deprecating jokes were. It stopped me dead in my tracks, and for the first time in my twenty-four years of life I was forced to question why I always made fun of myself. Upon reflecting, I could see long-standing patterns of submissive and apologetic behaviour, often disguised as humour, that reduced my self-respect and put up barriers between me and others. Her feedback hurt my feelings in the immediate moment but had a monumentally positive impact on my longer-term quality of life. I'm so glad she said that! She helped me so much more than everyone who just laughed along and let me take the piss out of myself.

Ask permission first. When it comes to giving recognition, one main difference between *giving to get* and *giving freely* is whether the person has expressed a desire to hear it. People who are giving to get will just throw a compliment at you, or give you feedback and advice, without any true consideration about what is best for you. I was first properly introduced to the concept of asking permission when I read *The Prosperous Coach* by Steve Chandler and Rich Litvin. I quickly discovered, after some experimentation, that people were much more open to advice if they were first given the opportunity to reject it. If they said "Yes", their mind would freely open to my feedback. It can be as simple as saying, "I have some honest feedback for you if you're interested," and letting them respond, without further insistence if they say, "No, thanks."

You must focus on giving targeted and specific honesty. If your feedback is broad, vague, and generalized, it is unlikely to be helpful. In fact, it can do more harm than good. If I say to someone, "You're not doing that very well," I leave them with increased insecurity and

yet I've given them no guidance on how to improve. It's basically just an insult, and by being vague I'm implying that there is no hope for them. The same applies for vaguely positive feedback. If I say, "You're doing a great job," they have no idea what that means. They have to guess what specific actions I want them to continue with. They're likely to then assume that *everything* they do is satisfactory, which may encourage them to be complacent. Targeted, honest, and specific feedback should define exactly what action they took, what impact it had, and what would need to happen in the future to achieve beneficial outcomes for all concerned.

Lastly, recognition needs to be in the form that will be most helpful to the person receiving it, which is sometimes not what they *want* to hear. This can go both ways: some low self-worth people might not want to hear that they've actually done something well, while arrogant high-achievers often don't want to hear that they could improve. Either way, you're not helping them if you condone this avoidance of truth. Remember, if they've given you permission to give feedback, then they've asked for the truth! In my experience, the old rule of 5:1 has proven effective: for every piece of critical feedback, give at least five pieces of recognition (though not all at the same time). This will feel like a fair balance to the receiver, is more likely to encourage helpful behaviour, and will force you to look for the true strengths in people.

Giving true recognition forces you to live by the values of curiosity, presence, honesty, compassion, assertiveness, and more. The next time you feel like complimenting a person, try focusing a little harder and look at the *effort* they've made, and how this relates to your understanding of their values. When you learn true recognition, you can say things like this (after receiving permission):

> *"When you picked up that extra shift for Tom, I was impressed by your generosity. It allowed the team to feel relieved from the pressure of extra work, while Tom got to rest without feeling guilty. I definitely don't expect you to pick up other peoples' shifts, but when you do chip in like that I deeply appreciate it."*

How much better does that sound compared to, "You're so helpful, thanks"?

Passion

Living with purpose is a simple way to give freely by just expressing yourself honestly. Most people I've talked to admire passion. When you are deeply interested, determined, engaged, invested, focused, and enjoying what you do, it has a positive impact on other people, even when you are not making any effort to have an impact! All it requires is that they are given the opportunity to *witness* it. Seeing someone live to their full potential inspires us to live more fully ourselves, so being honest about your passions and allowing people to witness you bravely pursuing your passions is a gift you can give freely. In the same vein, hiding your talents and passions deprives people of inspiration, entertainment and wonder.

Everyone is seeking a meaning. Existence is such a mind-fuck experience. Why are we here? What's the point? What the hell is this thing called Life? These questions plague us at every turn, challenging our sense of purpose, connection and belonging. But, as I've mentioned in the previous book of the trilogy, *Nothing to Lose*, the only time people can be guaranteed to *not* question the meaning of life is when they are focused and purposefully engaged in a task. So, when we witness someone engaged passionately in an activity, it appears that we are seeing someone who has answered these deep questions, someone who seems to be connected with a meaningful purpose for living, and we get excited. We gain the wonderful feeling of hope that perhaps there is a reason to live after all.

There's almost nothing I find more entertaining and fascinating than watching someone who is good at what they do and they absolutely love doing it. This is why I will pay to watch a band play live even though I own their album. There's something uplifting about seeing *them* do it, with the limitless enthusiasm that only someone living passionately by the value of honesty can invoke. I can get the same feeling from watching dancers, tradesmen and athletes who are clearly doing what they were *born* to do.

During the start-up phase of my business, I experimented with social media posting. One type of post consistently received a powerful response from my audience: posts that showed my

passion for what I'm doing. Sometimes this might take the form of a vulnerable post about the suffering I put myself through to follow my dreams. Other times it could be an honest brag about the joys of doing what I love. Either way, whenever I shamelessly shared love for my work, it got a much more positive response than anything else I could possibly think to write of, beating helpful tips and even free resources.

If you are holding back on honestly expressing passion for what you're doing, you are essentially being selfish. You have a gift that you can give to others whilst also experiencing reward for yourself! It might be hard to believe that doing what you love is a form of giving to others, until you start doing it. When you get started, your social fears will tell you that you are attention-seeking, vain, selfish, or an inconvenience, and some of those closest to you may actively try to discourage you. But watch what happens when you *really* commit to it. Watch people change as they see how much you love it.

Hans and Brandon, participants of a BROJO 'Superman' program I run with another coach, Mike Wells, are both musicians who are deeply passionate about their art. However, for most of their artistic careers, they 'played small'. Brandon only allowed people to see him playing in a band, where he was able to blend his music in with others to hide his true sound. Hans mostly did commercial commission work, so his creations were always directed to meet the requirements of his clients, and moderated to be more generic and popular. Neither had taken the leap to publish truly authentic music that was for themselves, by themselves, to the public. They were both scared of the vulnerability of being judged on their 'real' sound.

Yet, when both of them started living by the value of courage and showing their real music to the world, they were met with a hugely positive response. Brandon put away his perfectionism and started releasing short video clips of his latest guitar riffs, even when they were unpolished and still in draft. Hans started experimenting with live online sets and quirky ways of showing his talent (e.g. doing a livestream concert from inside his car). People were inspired by their creativity and talent, which everyone had been deprived of until they finally stepped up their courage and honesty, and they got better responses to their real music than they ever had to the safer stuff they'd stuck to previously.

No one is ever inspired by watching someone drag themselves through a boring activity that they have no passion for. Give people the gift of watching you engage in your honest passions. Give them hope that a human can be brave enough to pursue what they truly love, even at the risk of mockery and failure. Give the world the entertaining show of a human thoroughly engaged in a task that they love to do. You don't need to even think about giving, you will be doing so naturally by just expressing your passion honestly.

Practical Giving: The Ninja

One of my favourite giving philosophies is John Cooper's *Social Heartistry*. He gave me the idea for *The Giving Ninja*, a simple exercise you can engage in any time you feel like increasing your ability to live by the value of giving. All you need to do is give a gift without the receiver knowing it came from you. It must be anonymous (as if delivered by a well-trained ninja), or at least given in a way where the person gets the gift but cannot reward you in return. This will help train you to reward *yourself* when you give, because no one else will be able to.

My favourite application of this technique is what we at BROJO call a 'hit and run'. This involves noticing something you genuinely like about a complete stranger, and then approaching them and sharing this observation. Once delivered, you leave immediately, before they can even respond. This allows them to wonder all day at how you gave them positive feedback simply because you appreciated them so much that you were compelled to express it. For example, you might see someone with confident posture and say to them, "Excuse me, can I tell you something? Seeing the confident way you hold yourself is really inspiring to me, it gives me a sense of strength. Thank you"... and then you leave before they have a chance to convince themselves that you were just trying to get something from them.

John Cooper has fun with this in other ways. John once shared a story with me about how some kids were crying and whining on a flight he was on. Rather than complain uncomfortably like

the other nearby adults did, he put together an impromptu show by drawing eyes on airsick bags and using them as puppets. Other times, he'll make origami flowers from napkins and give them to people randomly, or leave mysterious notes on peoples' windscreens saying things like, "Smile, you're an awesome person!"

One way to be a Giving Ninja is to talk shit about people behind their backs. No, I'm kidding! Really, what I like to do instead is *talk people up* behind their backs. When I was at the Department of Corrections, I would see other managers taking credit for their team's successes. This was obviously a trying-to-get mindset. So, I deliberately went in the other direction, promoting individuals in my team and giving them all the credit for our successes. I never told my staff that I did this (because I knew that I'd be just trying to get their gratitude), but I would see the outcomes later when they successfully gained promotions and other opportunities due to the positive and genuinely earned reputations I'd helped them to build. Seeing them being rewarded for their efforts was enough to satisfy me. I didn't need them to say thanks.

The point is that honesty *is* giving, and that giving can be rewarding without requiring reciprocation from others. You can improve your life and the lives of others by just giving genuine feedback, being open about your passions, and having fun playing the Giving Ninja game. Honesty is its own reward. You receive rewards simply for expressing yourself, and other people receive gifts from you without a hidden agenda or pressure to return the favour. Everyone wins!

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Feedback, whether positive or negative, gives people better information to work with, so it is always a gift if it's truthful.
- Doing what you love is a form of giving through role-modelling and inspiration, so let people see you doing what you love.
- Practice distancing yourself from recognition and appreciation for your gifts, so you can enjoy giving without needing reward for doing it.

KEY ACTIONS

- Choose one of the acts of giving through being honest, and do it within the next twelve hours. Make sure it's impossible for you to receive recognition from anyone other than yourself for this act.

PART 2:

Engage

Now that we've explored the inner mindset and beliefs required to be more honest, it's time to translate this into practical action. In this next part of the book, we're going to practice being more honest in real-life situations, through building courage, confronting others, and learning the techniques of Powerfully Honest Language.

Quantum Parts Courage

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers fear."

Nelson Mandela

Courage and Bravery

Are you currently waiting to feel more courageous, in order to do something you know you should do immediately, like speaking more honestly, starting a business, ending a relationship, or traveling abroad? Courage and bravery are a mystery to most people. We can define these terms easily enough: *courage* is the internal power to override resistance, uncertainty and fear (although many people mistakenly believe that courage is the absence of fear), and *bravery* is to engage in courageous behaviour — basically anything that's emotionally difficult to do. Courage is the fuel you need to bravely express yourself in a world that often reacts poorly to integrity. It's the push that gets you past your irrational fears. Yet few people seem capable of understanding how this energy is generated or sustained. Many people know what courage is and yet they seem incapable of creating it. Too many people sit around waiting for courage to come to them before they'll engage in acts of bravery, as if courage is something that gets delivered by an outside source.

One of the most debilitating beliefs is that you can't express yourself honestly unless you *already* feel courageous. You wait to feel good before you do the right thing. This was true of me for most of my life. I would wait to feel courageous before asking out the girl I liked, and so I spent many years lonely and single. I would wait to feel safe before I would reveal my insecurities to people, and so I only created superficial connections. I would wait to feel outraged before standing up to someone who crossed my boundaries, which

usually meant a few hours or even days of sulking and resentment that was eventually followed by a squeaky-voiced mini-tantrum. Because of this, I was often disrespected, taken for granted, or outright abused.

After many years of missed opportunities due to my cowardly approach to honesty, I had a deeper look into my beliefs. I started to notice some exceptions to the rules. For example, the first time I ever went on stage with a band to perform, I was literally shaking with stage-fright. We were all untalented thirteen-year-old wannabe rock stars. We'd painted our faces and were facing a large audience of students and their parents to perform a Marilyn Manson cover, no less. Sure, we got the timing wrong, and for about fifteen embarrassing seconds I dropped the microphone and couldn't get it sorted out, but we got through it relatively well and delivered our debut performance. The fear made me shaky... but it didn't stop me.

The lesson I learned, through exceptional examples like this, is that I didn't *need* to feel courageous before taking brave action. The feeling of courage often only appears during (or slightly after) the action is taken. Even though I might have been close to vomiting from anxiety-based nausea whenever I approached a stranger to start a conversation, after it was all done a sense of power flowed through my body. Sometimes this feeling would occur quickly, right after I'd spoken my first few words. Other times it might not happen until after initiating conversations with five separate strangers over the course of thirty minutes. I would start to experience what I later called *Bulletproof Mode* — a sense of being untouchable and unaffected by fear, like a runner's high, where I felt capable of doing almost anything without hesitation. Occasionally, the courageous feeling never showed up, yet I was still able to do the right thing by my values: to be brave. I didn't need to feel courageous to express myself honestly or act boldly.

All your life you've been subtly conditioned to believe that you need to feel a certain motivational emotional state before you can hope to engage in honest action: to feel good (e.g. courageous) in order to do something brave. *But you've been lied to*. Your programming is faulty. The truth — which my clients and I have tested beyond measure — is the exact opposite. *Behaving bravely*, through choosing to express yourself honestly while experiencing

uncomfortable sensations like fear, *is how you generate rewarding feelings of courage*.

Give Me More of That Fear!

In order to live by the values of courage and honesty, you must take the action you're afraid to take, which means willingly choosing to increase fearful sensations in order to create the rewarding experience we often refer to as 'bravery'. Simplistic as 'feel the fear and do it anyway' sounds, many people agree with this idea rationally and yet they fail to act on it, continuing to wait for the courageous feeling to occur *before* they act. There is no cheat-code or shortcut available here. The painful truth is that courage can only be experienced through *choosing to feel more fear.*

You may see this as a cliché, an obvious truth, but are you living by it? Do you frequently and deliberately say to yourself: "Well, it's about time I chose to feel anxious today! What can I do to shit myself a little?" I'm guessing not. If you're like most people, you'll happily repost a quote on your social media page about how bravery requires facing fear, but when it comes to the real-life crunch you usually sit tight and wait, hoping that your anxious sensations or apathetic lack of motivation will pass. You have a secret hope that bravery will feel comfortable, not squeamish, sickening or terrifying.

I get it. It's tough to generate courage, to choose to feel even more fear than what you think you can handle. When I started to experience consistent and rewarding feelings of courage for engaging in brave acts, I still struggled to understand how exactly I was able to move myself into action while feeling afraid. How did I take the first scary step? I remember times I could make myself go to the gym when I really didn't want to. How was I able to accomplish something that I didn't feel like doing? I used to describe this as 'will power', yet upon further inspection I found that I was often *un*willing to take these actions despite being able to force myself to do them.

Finally, after some further digging, I began to notice a pattern.

Quantum Parts Courage: Breaking It Down Into Tiny Steps

During my Pick Up Artist days, when I was learning how to talk to strangers on the street, I discovered a helpful and simple mantra to aid my attempts: "Just follow your feet". Instead of getting all locked up inside your head, predicting the millions of potentially terrifying consequences of going up to strangers and talking to them, you redirect your focus to your shoes and literally watch them walk, one step at a time, toward the person you're interested in. Once you're there, you just look up at the person's face, open your mouth, and allow sound to come out. It's an incredibly effective strategy for bravery that works for any situation.

The essential foundation to this approach is to break down any seemingly big and overwhelming action into *tiny* parts, refocusing your attention on your own immediate behaviour and observing your bodily sensations without judgment. Instead of 'talking to a stranger', you're simply stepping with your left foot, then your right, and then your left again, and so on. Each step is an accomplishment in and of itself. Sure, there are various sensations happening in your body as you go, like shaky knees, rapid breathing, and racing thoughts, but they're just observable facts, each of which is non-lethal. 'Talking to a stranger' dissolves from a massive process into tiny individual actions and feelings that are each — and here's the important bit — *entirely manageable* by themselves.

After some testing and refinement, I started calling this process *Quantum Parts Courage*. 'Quantum' — as in quantum mechanics — means the smallest observable piece of something (e.g. a Planck measure of lightspeed). 'Talking to a stranger' is too big: there's too much fear to handle because this has too many moving parts to be considered as a single task. But one step toward the other person is easy enough to do, as are any of the other required steps. Saying "Hi" is manageable. Saying "I'm happy to meet you" after that is also a relatively simple task. Shaking their hand requires no major leap outside the comfort zone; you just reach out, grip, and shake gently. It's only when you look at all these actions simultaneously combined into a single massive event called 'talking to a stranger'

that it becomes terrifying. The small individual steps within any process are achievable and reasonable, each with only a small amount of fear and discomfort to endure.

I finally came to realise that the 'follow your feet' method revealed the deeper code behind courageous behaviour; a blueprint for bravery. Anyone can handle a bit of fear and behave with courage, but we all have personal limits. At any given moment, each of us has a certain level of fear that we presently feel unable to accept or overcome. You simply can't act when you're *too* afraid, and this is the issue that is preventing most people from engaging in courageously honest behaviour. The trick, therefore, is to be able to break down any process of behaviour into tiny pieces, small enough to stay below your subjective fear limit of 'too much' but still at least one step beyond your familiar comfort.

Some days I have a high fear tolerance, like the time I bungy-jumped over one hundred metres, or the time I told off the District Manager at Corrections, or the first time I directly admitted to a girl I wanted to have sex with her without first knowing if she even liked me. Other days, I barely have enough courage to try doing pull-ups during my workout. Putting it simply: every time I feel resistant to bravery, I must break down some big event into little individual pieces of behaviour that I can emotionally handle doing *right here and now.* And it doesn't matter how much I was able to handle in the past — *today's* limit of courage is what I must work with.

Courage is Wisdom

The reason you're avoiding scary honesty isn't that you're a 'pussy'. Your problem is that you perceive honest expressions and tasks as much bigger than they actually are. Your fear is the creator of this misperception — it's an effective tactic for manipulating you into avoidance. Fear makes you perceive speaking your mind to be a gigantic, impossibly-overwhelming action, so you never even get started. You've effectively been scared away from taking even a small, exploratory first step. But if speaking your mind is broken down into tiny steps (the first being something like saying:

"Excuse me" to just get attention), and you know that you're under absolutely no obligation to do anything beyond that first tiny action, suddenly it's not so scary. Sure, there's still a bit of fear there — as I mentioned, this is unavoidable — but it is a *manageable* amount.

Cowardice isn't a lack of strength: it's a faulty perspective. It's your imagination inaccurately combining thousands of small separate actions into one huge super-action. Fear adds together all of the cumulative effort of those tiny actions and presents them to you all at once, making the action or expression seem impossible. This also leads you to assume that others, who *can* do it, are somehow stronger than you, since they're achieving what seems impossible to you. In turn, this confirms your belief that you are 'less' than others, so you become even more afraid of taking action because now you don't trust yourself to be good enough. What a vicious pattern! The worst thing about all of this is that it's entirely based on fiction.

You might think that running a forty-kilometre marathon sounds impossible, but that jogging lightly for one hundred metres is totally feasible. It causes you almost no performance anxiety to imagine a small jog. Well, a marathon is simply repeating that one hundred metre jog four hundred times. It's something you are probably capable of, eventually, if you have a functioning set of legs. However, if you look at it lumped together as non-stop running, it's too much for your mind to handle (until after you've done a few marathons). You'll find many long-distance runners use a meditative process that allows them to focus their attention separately on every individual step. They know the next step is the only thing that is real, controllable and manageable, and that focusing on this gives them the courage to keep going.

This approach can be applied to any fearful situation you can think of. Public speaking seems impossible to someone who has a fear of it, yet walking up to the stage is manageable. Once you're there, walking across to the microphone is also not a big deal. Of course, there are anxiety sensations occurring more than usual, but these are just heartbeats, beads of sweat, and tensing muscles — all completely manageable bites of experience and sensation. 'Being anxious' might be too much to handle, but broken down into its parts there's not a single element of anxiety that is beyond your ability to handle (and even enjoy). It's all just heat, vibration and weight.

Breaking things down into Quantum Parts will help you be brave — it's a form of active, in-the-moment desensitization to fear. It takes practice. You can train yourself in normal everyday activities. Try breaking down into small steps common tasks like showering, driving to work, or setting boundaries with your children. Teach yourself to see that nothing is bigger than a tiny action. Over time, your courage to face any process of tiny actions will increase. You'll come to see life like I do: just a series of simple, tiny, mostly insignificant actions.

The concept of Quantum Parts is only part of the puzzle behind what courage is made of. To help you live by the value of courage, I must also speak of another key element to courage: *the permission to quit*. We'll explore that next.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Bravery means simply doing the right thing when it feels uncomfortable to do — usually involving a choice to experience slightly more fear than you prefer.
- Courage is an internal sensation and belief in yourself that you gain by engaging in acts of bravery — you will not experience it without first earning it.
- Cowardice is not an absence of bravery, it's an inaccurate perception of a task — you think that a given task is much bigger than it is, because you've combined smaller steps into one event.
- Quantum Parts Courage is a process of breaking down an intimidating event into its smallest action parts, and then focusing your attention fully on only the next tiny step, without obligation to do more than that next tiny step.

KEY ACTIONS

- Practice breaking down events and activities into quantum parts, like household chores, conversations with friends, and exercise routines. Notice how small and manageable each individual part really is.

The Permission to Quit

"Mistakes are always forgivable, if one has the courage to admit them."

Bruce Lee

The Burden of Achievement

All of our lives we are told that we need to win and succeed. Failure is seen as something bad and wrong, something that needs to be prevented or corrected. Quitting is often seen as failure and cowardice. We're all conditioned to think that it's somehow weak to back out of a process we've committed to before it is 'successfully' completed. We're scared that quitting will be humiliating, maybe even culminating in being ostracized and rejected. We think only *losers* quit, and everyone hates a loser.

When you take this cultural perspective into account, you can see clearly why most of us are such cowards. In the previous chapter, we talked about how people tend to group together a lot of tasks, a process, into a single massive and unachievable event. Now you can also see that once we've done that, we then pressure ourselves to complete the entire massive event, or otherwise be deemed a loser in the eyes of society. We attach performance pressure to an already overwhelming task size. From this ungodly coupling, true cowardice is born, and it goes by the name of *procrastination*.

How can you expect to get started on something when you view it as both impossible to complete and humiliating to quit once you've begun? *Of course* you will shrink away from beginning such a pointless endeavour. It makes total sense to procrastinate on something that's clearly unachievable. From your mind's perspective there is absolutely nothing to be gained from such an experience — it's a suicide mission. You're asking yourself to start something you

believe can't or won't be finished. And this is often how we view the task of being more honest.

The trouble is that both of these views are just plainly incorrect, as you can probably see. Firstly, no task is too big to be accomplished, since every event is simply a process of micro quantum-tasks, each of which you are totally capable of completing. Secondly, any process can be stopped once it's started because you're free to quit after any quantum part of the process. There is no power in the world that forces you to complete a process you've engaged in, whether it's starting a business, going to the gym, or just telling someone what you honestly feel. Each of these 'events' are simply a series of hundreds or even thousands of micro-actions, and at the completion of any one of these tiny milestones along the way you have the full freedom and right to completely bail out!

Relax! There is No 'Start' or 'Finish'

Whoever said, "You must finish what you started" is full of shit. This statement doesn't even make sense, because the start and finish of any event or process is totally subjective to each individual. When does a wedding start and finish? Does the engagement start the process or does it only count on the day of the actual ceremony? Does it begin when the first attendee wakes up, or when the bride begins putting on make-up, or when the groom starts waiting expectantly at the altar? Is it over after "I do," or after the dinner, or after the first dance, or after signing the registry? Everyone will have different answers, so 'finishing' this event is impossible to objectively define and therefore impossible to actually achieve. Objectively, no one has ever measurably started or finished a wedding, yet plenty of people managed to get married all the same. There was no 'right' way to start or finish.

This is even more obvious with the act of being honest. When does honesty start and finish? It's impossible to objectively draw a line, so you can take the pressure off yourself to get it 'right'. You simply try to be *more* honest, and stop when you've had enough. There is no obligation to keep plowing through a difficult expression,

disclosure, or confrontation, any more than you want to at that moment. You're *allowed* to quit any time, and end any interaction where you feel you've reached today's limit of courage or energy. The work of being more honest is never really finished. There's always more honesty waiting for you tomorrow. To this day, I'm *still* working on being more honest, and I'm honestly one of the most honest people I know!

We are told that you must not give yourself the option of backing out, otherwise you won't have the drive to achieve great things. Do you believe this? I certainly did. I was firmly told, in so many ways, that commitment and loyalty to completing a process are required for success and for gaining the respect of society. I was told that this is what 'motivation' means. Little did I know that the opposite is true. Commitment and loyalty create *pressure*, inflating small tasks into a process that you cannot quit, until they appear to be one giant difficult task which eventually overwhelms us. This can prevent us from even starting, as this all can be simulated in our imagination. It demotivates us to think this way. Keep in mind, pressure to complete a task is not the same as passionate dedication to a meaningful cause. I'm dedicated to being honest, but that doesn't mean I have to complete writing this particular senten...

You might think that starting a confrontationally honest conversation obliges you to keep talking until it's officially 'over'. You don't see it as simply saying one word at a time — you see it as a massive process called an 'argument' that condemns you to an endless conversation full of discomfort, conflict and confusion. Because of this view, you figure it's easier to just avoid starting a fight. It's because you think there's a 'start' and 'finish' to a confrontation that you feel overwhelmed and unable to speak even a single truth. But the problem is that you might not even know what the truth really is until *after* you start talking!

If you don't have permission to quit, you probably won't start. You must remove the obligation to keep going any further than you feel able to. There is always more truth to be expressed, you'll never get to the end of it, so stop overwhelming yourself with the size of the task. Being more honest is a tiny action. It means that the next few words that come out of your mouth are truthful, and that's all! You are not obliged to go any further. This strategy successfully got me

through the times when I wanted to quit while I was starting up my coaching business (essentially, when I was beginning my mission to fight for honesty). Giving myself permission to quit *prevented* me from giving up. I only felt like bailing out when I put pressure on myself to be 'successful'.

Pressure to Achieve is the Enemy of Motivation

You may think that you quit goals because you aren't dedicated enough, or that you lack the willpower and courage, or that you must have failed to fully commit yourself. I say: bullshit. You probably gave up because you pressured yourself to finish *the whole thing* without having permission to quit. If you had given yourself the freedom to leave at any time after the completion of any quantum part of the process, you'd have none of that success-pressure on your shoulders and therefore every small action in the process would be a conscious, unforced choice, which you would be far more likely to follow through. We don't want to be slaves, not even to ourselves. We want to be autonomous leaders who make decisions and are free to change their minds based on any new evidence we gain through experience.

Any coach will tell you: as soon as you start trying to *force* someone to take action, they'll often actively work against it *even if it's good for them*. In the past, whenever I wanted to quit smoking I'd be just about to throw away my last cigarette and some asshole would say, "You should give that shit up, it's bad for you." Immediately, my anti-authority ego would kick in and I'd head straight out to buy a new pack of ciggies, just to spite them. When you try to force someone to do something uncomfortable, they'll try to protect themselves, often by engaging in a behaviour that is unhelpful for them. You'll usually do more harm than good if you put pressure on people to complete a difficult task, *including when you do it to yourself.*

You can see this in a marriage. I believe the issue with divorce rates these days is not that people aren't committed, it's because

they are! You wake up one day and look at your partner, who perhaps you're just not totally loving today, and suddenly think, "Oh shit, I have to stay with this person for the rest of my life, and that means *decades* of this feeling I'm having right now!" You panic and do something stupid, like cheating or seeking an impulsive divorce. Compare this to a person who sees marriage as simply a partnership that has no guaranteed future, and who knows that it's always their choice to stay or go. The relationship is taken one day at a time. On a morning such as this, they would probably just say to their partner something like: "I'm feeling weird today, I think I need some time to myself," and go for a walk before talking it through peacefully (and probably staying in the relationship).

Just Run as Far as You Want To

When it comes to being more boldly honest, it will help to give yourself permission to take it one little step at a time. It's a technique I call *Running As Far As You Want To.*

Let's say you're going for a jog. Rather than putting pressure on yourself to run a full five kilometres, which you might not feel like doing today, just run for as far as you feel like running. Run for the sake of running, rather than reaching an arbitrary goal. I tried this myself. Some days I would run more than five K's, other days I could only do a few hundred metres, but I ran *some distance* almost every time I planned to! In the past, if I couldn't be bothered doing the whole planned distance, then I simply wouldn't run at all. Just running as far as I wanted to was much more consistently successful (and it helped me realize that I hate running and needed to find a new way to exercise).

This applies to expressing yourself honestly with words, too. Instead of 'going to talk to her', you can start walking towards her, and go as far as you want to, with full permission to bail at any time. Maybe it's just three steps in her direction, maybe it's just making simple eye contact with a smile, or maybe it's a full-on conversation and asking her out. The key here is that you'll do *something*, which is so much more than what most people do when

they're scared and unmotivated: nothing at all. More opportunities will become available to you and your courage will grow with increased experience over time. Every step counts and quitting is okay. As long as you attempt to be more honest than you're usually comfortable being, you're making progress.

Doing *something* ensures that you build up pain-tolerance for fearful sensations, as well as giving you a touch of helpful frustration. When you don't do anything at all, you just feel like a loser and become even more pressured to take action, and by extension more afraid, as the little task grows into a monster. Conversely, when you manage to perform just a few small actions of the process, with full permission to bail out at any time, you'll become more experienced with fearful sensations (and therefore grow an ever-increasing baseline of courage). This experiential evidence will help you build up a case for believing in yourself and trusting yourself to handle the unknown. Eventually, and I can tell you this from experience: you will start *looking forward* to expressing yourself boldly and acting courageously. That's when true bravery kicks in: when getting scared becomes *fun*.

What are you still reading for? Go and do something small right now! You know what it is. Stop fucking around and overwhelming yourself by trying to justify why you should not be taking any action. Move your arse! Keep it small, quit as soon as you've had enough, and just do something.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Give yourself permission to quit at any point in time, you don't need to commit beyond what you can handle — tomorrow's another day.
- Anything that's more than nothing is progress.
- Allow yourself to fail, as frustration will give you motivation and increased courage over time.
- Focus on building up increased tolerance to fear rather than overcoming it completely. Think of becoming more honest over time, rather than being totally honest right now.

KEY ACTIONS

- Go and do something small and slightly scary right now, just to test this out! (e.g. tell someone how you truly feel about them, be it positive or negative).

Powerfully Honesty Language

"The development of language is part of the development of the personality, for words are the natural means of expressing thoughts and establishing understanding between people."

Maria Montessori

Expressing Yourself

Take a moment to compare these two different expressions:

"Life is unfair because people suck. I should get better treatment than this."

vs.

"Today, something didn't go the way I expected and I got myself bogged down in a self-pity party for a little while. I do this whenever I forget that I'm lucky to be alive.Thankfully, it doesn't last."

These are both different ways of potentially expressing *the exact same* experience and sensations, yet they appear significantly different. Imagine people saying these to you: which would you prefer? Which would you be more likely to respect? Which appears to be coming from a powerfully confident person, and which appears to be coming from a piteous victim? What are the key differences in these statements that provoke different reactions from you?

Integrity encompasses all of what you do (i.e. the activities that take place in your career, your hobbies, and maintenance of your health), but expressing yourself honestly, which is one possible

manifestation of integrity, is where most people truly struggle. This is, in part, because there are almost infinite ways in which you can translate what you believe, think and feel into words or facial expressions. Sometimes this abundance of choice is overwhelming. Sometimes there are so many ways in which you could express something that you don't know which is the best way. Other times, a certain way is clear but seems dangerous. Sometimes, given your uncertainty, you brood in silence waiting for a clear choice of words to emerge from your subconscious. Other times, despite the huge range of words and expressive body language displays consciously available to you, the truth seems to be so painful or confusing that you cannot choose even a single word to express it.

I wish to demystify the expression of truth. We have already explored how fear makes truthfulness appear far more complicated than it really is, and now we'll move onto how *language* can present a similar barrier. In the next few chapters, we're going to explore how to express yourself as honestly as possible with verbal and non-verbal language, addressing all of the potential conflicts that can occur inside you (and with others) about what the truth actually is.

At this point, I must disclose a belief that will colour my position throughout the book: I believe that 'your truth' is not really up for debate. While philosophers, theologians, historians and scientists alike squabble over the definition of what is true, I do not believe that you have any doubt about whether *you're* being honest or dishonest. You can play with semantics and philosophies and "it's all relative" all you like, but you ain't fooling me. I strongly believe that deep down, at least subconsciously (as demonstrated by emotions like guilt, which we'll explore soon), you know the difference between expressing yourself truthfully and being deliberately deceptive in order to avoid discomfort. We will not need to get bogged down with intellectual debates about the truth in this book — we're going to cut through the crap and get down to business: you're either expressing yourself honestly or you're not, and most of the time you know which is which.

How Do You Know What the Truth Really Is?

How you express yourself will help define your truth — honest expression is actually a necessary process to form a clear picture of the truth. Before you speak, the truth is just a half-baked idea inside your head — it's only once you try to say it that it takes a definitive form. You often only realise whether something is truthfully expressed *after* you say it, not before. It starts as vague ideas in your head: fragments of language and imagery and a sense of what you're thinking and feeling. These internal musings are just the potential for truthfulness. Once they leave your mind and are presented to the outside world as language or actions, they take a specific form. In other words, you're not being honest until you say it out loud, with words or body language.

There is a clear boundary in your mind that separates honesty from dishonesty. Once you find your way into the realm of honesty, there are an almost infinite number of ways you could choose to honestly express what you're thinking and feeling — a spectrum of *accuracy*. The truth can take many forms. You define and give form to your truth by choosing how you present it with your language and actions. You choose where to place yourself on this spectrum whenever you express yourself. I can say, "I'm sad," or I can say, "I'm overcome by a sense of heaviness and loss," and mean exactly the same thing with both expressions, yet one is more honest than the other.

We're about to get into some very practical details and guidance soon. But first, in this chapter, we will explore this accuracy spectrum. We'll look at the difference between *weak honesty* and *powerful honesty*. Keep the concept of *accuracy* in mind as we explore different degrees of honesty.

Weak Honesty vs Powerful Honesty

Honesty is not black and white. There's a definite difference between being honest and being dishonest, but there isn't ever

only one way for you to be honest. There is a spectrum, and this range can be envisioned as a hierarchy based on accuracy. Honesty can be almost anything, from vague, victimised rantings that border on dishonesty (weak), through to specifically accurate, bold and vulnerable expressions (powerful).

The more accurately you express yourself, the more powerful your honesty will be. When I say *powerful*, I mean expressions that make you feel powerfully confident while also giving others the impression of autonomic power; expressions free from vagueness, neediness, shame, and attachment to outcomes. Powerful honesty is responsible, bold, vulnerable, accurate, confident, transparent, compassionate, and non-manipulative. It encourages others to respect us, though it does not require respect. It invites good-fit people to come closer to us, though it does not require love. It pushes unhealthy connections and situations away (most of the time), and it breaks our harmful attachments to false beliefs.

When I say *weak* honesty, I mean cowardly, hesitant, apologetic, shameful, attached to assumptions and biases, and — on occasion — deliberately manipulative. While it may still technically count as honesty, the data is misrepresented or is presented poorly and unconvincingly. It's speaking from insecurities and a desperate need to obtain an outcome. The accompanying body-language is often weird, incongruent, creepy, confusing, or otherwise off-putting for the listener. It's like having a terrible sales-rep trying to sell a great product but doing so in such an unconvincing manner that no one wants to buy it.

While powerful honesty is so attractive and moving that it could convince one to believe anything, weak honesty will be unable to convince someone even if what you're saying has been proven to be true. Don't worry if this is all a bit too conceptual right now, we'll get into clear examples and detail soon.

'Too Honest' vs Accuracy

One of the biggest fears we have when it comes to being honest is that we will hurt other people (which will then cause our own

suffering). We fear being *too* honest. Powerful honesty language is part of the solution to this, but at first glance it may provoke fear by appearing to be 'too honest', especially when we start talking about being vulnerable. If you're worried that being more honest will mean that you become nasty, judgmental, blunt, or otherwise hurtful, then keep reading because these following chapters will help you see (and express) all that negative shit in a new, more accurate way, with the best possible chance that the receiver will not take it personally.

And your other main worry — that people won't like you anymore — well, that might come true, but these people will be the ones who probably shouldn't be in your life anyway because they don't accept you for who you are, and powerful honesty will support you to quickly replace them with more suitable peers (there's a whole section on building genuine social circles with honesty, coming up later). Always keep in mind: someone reacting badly to your honesty doesn't mean it was wrong to say it. It just means they don't have the emotional strength to handle the truth, and that's not *your* problem, it's theirs.

Before we get into detail, there is one key point that you must keep in mind: the only thing I can accurately speak about is what I think and how I feel when I look at you (or the world). The only thing I know for sure is *my reaction to what I perceive*. This inner experience is something I have privileged access to. Everything outside of my perspective is something I cannot be certain about. I don't really know if what I see and perceive is real, I only know my interpretation of reality. For all I know, I could be dreaming, or locked up in a psychiatric ward and imagining I'm writing a book right now. All I know for certain is that I subjectively perceive something and make judgments about it. So, as we go through this chapter, keep in mind this guiding principle to powerful honesty:

The only truthful thing that you can ever really talk about is what's going on inside you. Powerful honesty is the language used to describe and share your perception of experience.

The Spectrum of Honesty

Once you're no longer deliberately deceiving, hiding or avoiding truthful information, you're in the realm of expressing yourself honestly. There is an infinite range of how honest you can be: the spectrum of accuracy. To enter this spectrum at the weakest end, you need to only attempt to be truthful.

In this, and the following few chapters, we're going to get a bit more critical about how to improve your accuracy. Once you've made the initial effort to cross that line into honesty, you can start to experiment with becoming more accurate, and therefore more powerful with your expressions over time. For simplicity's sake, I will outline three comparative honesty-milestones on the accuracy spectrum to help you figure out where you're currently at. We'll also identify why your honesty isn't always being received well by others when you're expressing yourself at the weak end of the spectrum.

Weak Honesty: Being Vague and Misleading

The lowest and least accurate expression of honesty is to be vague and indirect. While technically you are sharing honestly, you're doing so in a lazy way, often based on assumptions or poorly considered opinions of some kind that you present as being *objectively* truthful. It often means: using only a few words, avoiding sharing anything vulnerable about yourself, and jumping to conclusions rather than putting an effort into discovering the truth. Details are lacking, points that are made are unclear, and people generally aren't given the information they need to truly understand you. When you express yourself vaguely, people are likely to feel bored, frustrated, patronized, confused, and even personally attacked, and therefore they will naturally react with defensiveness. You'll then subconsciously misinterpret their defensiveness as a reaction to you being honest, when in truth they are reacting to *the weakness of your delivery.*

Weak honesty includes expressing a subjective assessment as fact rather than opinion, like claiming that "heavy metal is the best music in the world" rather than saying, "I prefer heavy metal more than other genres". It can mean expressing assumptions about a collective group as a fact rather than fear-based bias, like stating, "All pop music fans must be stupid" rather than admitting, "I have a tendency to negatively and unfairly judge people who don't share my love of metal". It can mean wrongly attributing the locus of control of a consequence rather than taking responsibility for what you can control, like lamenting that "There's no point in me asking the band for an autograph because they don't care about me", rather than saying: "I've chosen to use my fear of rejection as an excuse to pass up this autograph opportunity".

In short, weak honesty *is* truthful — in that it represents what you think and feel — but it is inaccurately presented as a fact rather than as a subjective interpretation.

If I say, "Your taste in music sucks," I may be honestly representing what I'm thinking of you, but the thought itself is an inaccurate assessment. No authority has been given to me to decide what kind of music "sucks", and my beliefs around music are entirely skewed by my unique life experience. If I was raised in Brazil, I'd probably love salsa music. However, as I was raised in West Auckland, I've learned that any music that's less than brutal is pussy-ass crap. Being vague and judgmental may express my feelings in their rudimentary form — I'm obviously upset by music outside of my favourite genre — but I am not speaking about my truth accurately.

Accurate Honesty: Describing the Facts

We can become more accurate by simply describing *raw evidence*. This is where we recognise our judgments and assumptions as being essentially incorrect, so we move past those to look at factors of evidence that we perceive. This is where I look at *why* I think your music "sucks". I will share what I've noticed most distinctly with my

senses — what my mind seems to be focused on as justification for my judgment — and I will try my best to describe these with detached accuracy as much as possible. Instead of saying, "Your music sucks," I might say something more like: "The chorus of this song keeps repeating, and the singer has a whiny tone that agitates me."

Accurate honesty is all about reporting what you *observe*, both inside and 'outside' yourself, as pieces of data without labels, judgments or biases (as much as possible). I simply comment on *what is* without adding any vague collective name to it, without using too many judgmental words (e.g. "too, big, good, useless, best, boring"), and without assuming the cause and effect relationship (e.g. not using the word "because"). I don't claim that my agitation with this song means that it must be bad music, I simply leave it up to the listener to judge for themselves. I merely present the facts as I see them in their raw form: here's what I noticed and what is most obvious to me.

This objective description of observations is much more accurate than just vaguely commenting in a subjectively judgmental way. Yet we humans are *not* objective, so to describe something objectively leaves out an important factor in genuine honesty: your subjective individual experience. We are not unbiased machines, so to attempt to speak that way is a form of weaker honesty — presenting anything you notice as fact is less accurate than presenting it as a personal perception influenced by preferences and biases. But you mustn't present these perceptions as accurate facts...

Powerful Honesty: Describing Your Internal Experience

Ultimately, to be as accurately honest as possible, there is only one thing for me to express — *my reaction*. The highest level on the spectrum of honesty is, therefore, describing your unique internal experience. The only thing I can talk about with full accuracy and honesty is what I perceive is happening inside my conscious awareness, and I must talk about it as a subjective perception.

So, instead of saying, "Your music sucks," or even, "The chorus of this song keeps repeating, and the singer has a whiny tone that agitates me," the most accurate truth would be to say something more like this: "When I hear this song, I get immediately uncomfortable, it's like the sound is tearing through my brain." Through this kind of language, I take responsibility for my internal experience and share a piece of me, vulnerably creating the opportunity for us to deeply connect while avoiding the temptation to pretend that I am objective in any way.

There is no judgment about the music being good or bad. There is no uncertainty about how I feel or what I think. You can clearly see that I dislike the song, yet I haven't attacked you personally or gone beyond my truth. I'm not talking about anything that hasn't happened or that can be objectively debated, I'm just giving you an insight into *what it's like to be me* right here and now. This gives us the best possible chance of connection, and is ultimately the most powerful and convincing way I could express my true thoughts and feelings.

It's this level of accurate and powerful honesty that we will focus on in this book, and in the next chapter we're going to break down how it's done.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Honesty ranges in accuracy. There are many ways to be honest, and in this book we'll look at how to be honest and how to express yourself accurately and powerfully.
- *Weak honesty* is being vague, and talking about your opinions and perspectives as if they are facts e.g. "Your music sucks."
- *Accurate honesty* is attempting to describe raw data — observing reality and narrating what you see, e.g. "The chorus of this song keeps repeating, and the singer has a whiny tone that agitates me."
- *Powerful honesty* is where you describe only your inner experience, e.g. "When I hear this song, I get immediately uncomfortable, like the sound is tearing through my brain."

KEY ACTIONS

- In the course of the next 24 hours, record notes about what you say, and notice where they rate on the honesty spectrum. If you use judgmental words, record it as *weak*. If you try to rationally describe what's happening in a detached way, record it as *accurate*. And if you speak about your internal reaction as a subjective experience, record it as *powerful*.
- And, of course, if anything you say was not an attempt to express yourself honestly, record it as *dishonesty*.

The 5 Principles of Powerful Honesty

"But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought."

George Orwell

Being Honest Doesn't Have to Hurt

When attempting to be more honest, you will hit barriers, resistance and pain. We've covered why that is a necessary cost for living with integrity. But what about those times when pain seems to be *all* that you get for your efforts to be honest? What about when being honest seems to just go wrong nearly all the time?

Well, being a coach who specializes in guiding people how to live honestly, I've seen this pain occur many times for my clients during the initial integrity-development phase. Often, this is partly because they had previously built a world of lies around them that needs to be torn down with honesty — usually a combination of poor self-awareness, a bad-fit career, and superficial relationships. But most frequently, their problem is more about their *delivery* of honesty. They're trying to live by the principles of powerfully honest expression but not quite getting it right. Usually, there's something just a bit *off* about how they're delivering the message.

In this and the following few chapters, we're going to break down the delivery of honesty into five simple concepts. In this chapter, I'll give you a light taste of each principle — an overview — and then we'll delve into them more deeply. This will allow you to accomplish two things: to identify potential reasons why your previous attempts at honesty were poorly received by others or didn't increase your

confidence, and to give you practical guidance on how to be honest in a more powerful way.

Principle #1: Responsibility

As with all matters related to confidence and integrity, you must begin by taking *total* responsibility for yourself and your life. How you speak indicates the level of responsibility you are currently willing to accept, while also revealing where you are still being irresponsible and passing the ownership for your life to something outside of yourself (i.e. being a victim). Responsible honesty ensures that both you and your listener know that *you* own your life and your problems, and therefore your solutions are yours to create.

The simplest way to ensure that you'll express yourself with responsible honesty is to keep in mind that you are the one who creates your own inner experience. Your thoughts, feelings, reactions, beliefs, and everything else inside you were created and generated in some way by your own mind. You might not have conscious control over the entire process, but it's yours to own nonetheless. It's like owning a pet dog: you can't control it all the time, but if it shits on the carpet you're the one who must clean it up. No one else makes you think, feel or act. While you might be encouraged, triggered, provoked or influenced by outside forces, ultimately your decisions are still your own to make, and your language must reflect this if you are to take yourself seriously and be taken seriously by others.

So when speaking about your inner experience, always look to place the locus of control on yourself. Instead of saying: "You made me feel…", you'd say: "When you did that, I reacted by making myself feel…" Whatever occurs inside you, you made it happen, so when you share it, be sure to take ownership. Got a fear? Speak about how *you* make *yourself* afraid. Failed on the test? Speak about how *you* didn't prepare enough for it. Got dumped by your partner? Speak about the decisions *you* made that led to *you* choosing them, forming a relationship with them, and behaving in a way that contributed to the dissolution of your partnership. Even if someone

deliberately tricked or hurt you, you're the one who decided on how to react and therefore you're ultimately the master of this show. Speak in a way that acknowledges you as the leader of your life. In other words, never blame anyone for anything that bothers you — you bother yourself.

Principle #2: Boldness

The biggest problem that most people have when being honest is the weak way in which they express themselves — that vague, mumbling uncertainty that instantly makes you question the validity of their words. We can see from extreme examples (like Donald Trump) that you can get away with saying even the most horribly inaccurate shit ever conceived as long as you're shamelessly bold in saying it. Unfortunately, many people who are new to the levels of honesty described in this book become hesitant, apologetic, and weak in their delivery. There's an old truism often spoken about in science: people who are the least confident to speak are often the ones with the best things to say, while uninformed idiots have no problem voicing their awful ideas.

How boldly you express yourself will make a huge difference to how it will be received by others, as well as how you yourself will interpret it. When you blast it out like a shameless motherfucker, it will also *feel good* to do it. But when it just shamefully stutters and oozes its way out of you, like pus being reluctantly squeezed from a pimple, it will feel awful to express and those receiving it will be immediately filled with doubt. This is why we had a few chapters on building courage — if you say it fearfully, it loses all impact, meaning, and potential for growth. Say it strongly, and most will be convinced. This is not meant to be used as a manipulative tool (e.g. using boldness to convince people of a lie), but to help you build confidence and connections whilst being honest.

If you're going to express something, then go *all in*. Do it proudly. Speak like you're sharing the most important and clear message you're ever going to share; like your expression could save a life. Own that shit and make sure it's heard! Yes, you might be proven

wrong about it later, but if you do get proven wrong that will be just another opportunity to become even more accurate and truthful. Own your truth while being prepared to allow the world to correct you later. Don't speak like you're *already* wrong. Speak like what you're going to say will improve the world.

Principle #3: Vulnerability

There are many things you *could* say that would qualify as an honest expression of yourself. However, at any given time, there's usually just one main thing to say that would require actual bravery. It's easy to be honest about what you want to eat for breakfast or how well you slept the night before, but as you're telling people these things you'll be aware deeper down that there's a bigger truth you're scared to admit.

Vulnerable honesty means always trying to prioritise and express the *scary* truths. It's what I often call The Obvious Truth: an obviously bigger truth than all the other ideas floating around in your mind at that moment. A simple way to identify this truth is to ask yourself, "What don't I want people to know about me right now?" Go ahead, try it — see how obvious the answer is once you ask this question?

Confidence and shamelessness will come to full strength when there are no answers left to this question — when you've exposed all the obvious truths, or at least are in the habit of exposing them as soon as they arise in your awareness. When people tell me that being more honest isn't making them feel more confident, I can often find that it's because they're holding back a few big, obvious truths that are causing them the most shame. If you are only working out your biceps, simply because they're the easiest, your body won't get much healthier — you need to work on the weakest muscles, and most of all, the core muscles. Exposing vulnerable truths is your core confidence workout.

Principle #4: Perspective

Your truth is formed largely by your viewpoint. While reality is probably objective, our individual narratives describing it are always subjective — we always put a spin on our experience. Different perspectives produce different versions of truth, and some are much more powerful than others. There are certain perspectives that align well with confidence, connection and accuracy, and there are others that do not. Powerful honesty means trying to speak from a perspective that is healthy, helpful and accurate.

Generally speaking, a confident person tends to have an optimistic narrative: they are focused on what is going well, what they're grateful for, and what opportunities are available to them and everyone else. Listening to them speak, you get a sense that everything is going to be OK. Their language flows with a calm, detached vibe, like an author reading a story with love for all of the characters and their struggles. They have a *cosmic* perspective, never losing sight of the bigger picture and the wonder of life, and so they talk about the present moment without getting lost (or stuck) inside of it.

Insecure people, on the other hand, tend to be the opposite: they are pessimistic — focusing on what's going 'wrong' and portraying themselves as powerless victims who have been unfairly cheated. They describe their life as if it's a crime being committed against them. When they speak, the listener feels like they're sliding down into a frustrating, exhausting, fatalistic worldview, where life is pointless and full of suffering and impossible to handle. They are so focused on the minute details of daily struggles that they overlook or dismiss the wonders of life, which an accurate person would never fail to acknowledge.

Both perspectives are capable of being expressed honestly, so you can choose either of them at any time. A confident person talks about the successes, opportunities and things to be grateful for, while the insecure person focuses on the risks, failures and disappointments. A confident person talks frankly about painful things as an inevitable cost of being given the gift of life, while an insecure person complains about pain as if it's unfair and

unreasonable. Either of these viewpoints are true if you want them to be, but one is powerful while the other is weak.

Principle #5: Reciprocation

An important but largely overlooked part of being honest is knowing when to stop. Being honest does not mean *always* expressing yourself; a constant stream of noise and language. Others must be allowed to participate, and you must allow yourself to think, listen and process information. Therefore, there comes a time to stop talking.

In this book, whenever I say something like "you should always be honest," I mean that when you do speak you should aim to be as powerfully honest and accurate as possible. It does not mean that you should express *every* thought, feeling and sensation of your inner experience. To do so is what we'll call *over-sharing*. But, equally, you should not hold back vital pieces of information (i.e. *under-sharing*) that would allow others to form an accurate picture of you, and that would allow you to release shame about yourself. Reciprocal honesty is an art — you must balance expression with silence and listening, allowing the most important pieces of truth to be revealed without taking up more than your share of any interaction.

Once you've expressed any given truth, go silent and allow others to react. Imagine interactions as being like a game of tennis: you hit the ball only once — the best and most truthful shot relevant to that moment in the game — and then you wait for them to reciprocate by hitting a shot of their own back to you. You do not hit multiple balls without waiting for a response, and you do not try to dictate how they take their shot. You then react to their return shot however you see fit, but only once, and then you wait again.

In the next few chapters, we'll dive deeper into each of these principles of powerful honesty.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Responsibility means owning your inner experience when expressing it.
- Boldness means being unapologetic in your delivery.
- Vulnerability means revealing the deepest truth available at any given time.
- Cosmic perspective means speaking from an optimistic, grateful and accepting viewpoint.
- Reciprocity means respecting the other participants in the interaction whilst also respecting yourself.

KEY ACTION

- List three experiences where trying to be honest went 'wrong' for you (i.e. you got a bad reaction from the receiver) and try to identify which of these five principles you did not use.
- Think which one of these principles you are in most need of developing, and skip ahead to the upcoming chapter that focuses on that principle, before reading the others.

The 1st Principle of Powerful Honesty: Taking Responsibility

"Most people do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility."

Sigmund Freud

Own Your Experience

To speak honestly, you must first claim complete ownership for the way you are, so that when you express yourself you use words that reflect a responsible viewpoint. While it's true that you have been conditioned and influenced significantly by others throughout your life (to the point where you won't know exactly why you feel or do certain things), it is inaccurate to *blame* them for your decisions and subsequent behaviour. And, because your behaviour creates your life, you cannot blame them for your life either, which means that you cannot blame anyone else for anything!

Responsibility is not the same as blame. Blame says, "Who caused this? Who's fault is this?" while responsibility says, "It is what it is... so, what am I going to do about it?" You are responsible for everything about yourself as it currently stands, no matter how you got here. It's *your* mind that creates *your* inner experience, so your language must reflect ownership of everything about yourself, if you want to be truthful when you speak.

The key here is to understand that your reaction to anything comes from an entire lifetime of learning and experience. If I mock you for driving "too slowly" in traffic, it isn't actually your driving that

causes my reaction, it is really about an entire lifetime of learning to judge people based on driving ability. You essentially had nothing to do with it: I am not a victim of your driving — I'm a victim of *my own prejudice*. Except that I'm not really a *victim* at all, since I am responsible for my own mind, therefore I must also be responsible for my judgments. To speak from a victim-standpoint will always be inaccurate, because it implies that someone else is in control of who I am. I can't say for sure that you are "a slow driver"; all I can be certain of is that I am judgmental, and my judgments bother me.

At most, all someone else can do to me is remind me of my own beliefs — provoke ideas that already exist in my mind. I do the rest of the damage myself. So you must own everything about yourself, even your reaction to another person and their behaviour. They didn't *cause* your reaction, they simply provided some information and then your own mind reacted to this information with a subjective script. If someone cuts you off in traffic, they did not harm you — your own beliefs about traffic etiquette is what causes your frustration. Everyone reacts differently to stimuli, so we must speak only about our unique reaction if we wish to be sincerely and powerfully honest.

To put this point simply: *talk about yourself, not about others*. Here are some examples of victim-talk translated into responsibly honest language:

> *"You ruined my night"* becomes:
>
> *"When you did that, I got angry and started dwelling on it so much that I stopped having fun."*
>
> *"I'm a loser because no one likes me"* becomes:
>
> *"I label myself as a loser sometimes because I'm attached to approval from others and tend to punish myself when I don't receive it."*
>
> *"Guess I was just lucky"* becomes:
>
> *"I tried my best and the results probably show that my skills have improved."*
>
> *"I can't play basketball because I'm not tall enough"* becomes:

"I chose to give up on basketball because I'm not willing to face the challenge of being shorter than other players in the league."

"I'm rich because I'm smart" becomes:

"I received a large inheritance and got good training from my father on how to manage finances."

"He destroyed my dreams when he abused me" becomes:

"I gave up on my dreams when I refused to properly deal with my trauma."

"Sorry I'm late, the traffic was awful" becomes:

"I wish I had planned my trip better, I'm late because I failed to account for the traffic."

Speak About Your Reaction

Notice that it is *my reaction to things* that I focus on, not the things themselves, which is what a victim focuses on. Victims blame something like traffic for their pain, without taking responsibility for the fact that their pain comes from how they perceive traffic, and that they made a series of decisions that led to them being stuck in traffic. If for some reason I wanted to sit in a car without going anywhere, I would enjoy traffic. Traffic does not objectively hurt *everyone*, it only hurts those who perceive it in a harmful way.

Your perception is all you can accurately comment on — the traffic itself is a neutral event… as is anything in life. The philosophy of *existentialism* is really about acknowledging the premise that existence occurs *before* meaning. In other words, everything is neutral and meaningless until we choose to assign a meaning to it. Powerful honesty aligns with this philosophy; it acknowledges that whatever meaning you perceive something to have is your own creation, not an objective fact. Traffic is only painful because you assigned pain to it. If something hurts, it's because *you made it*

hurt. You must own your creations, even if they were constructed subconsciously.

To start speaking with more responsibility, look at where you tend to place blame (or credit) for results and situations. Notice the cause-and-effect theories you tell yourself about why things happen the way they do, and examine them with careful skepticism. Then, try to express the process of your reaction — *how* you blame and attribute cause — rather than the blame itself. Instead of saying, "I'm in a bad mood because the traffic was awful," you might say, "I've got myself into a bad mood and feel a great urge to blame it on the traffic." Talk about how you think and feel, rather than about the neutral thing that triggered this process, i.e. talk about your reaction to the traffic rather than the other drivers or the traffic itself.

Focus on your own experience and you will be more likely to speak with powerful responsibility. Here are some ideas on how to start your sentences; scripts that can act as training wheels to assist you in speaking more responsibly:

> *"I just had a thought that..."*
>
> *"When I saw you, for some reason I assumed that..."*
>
> *"I reacted to what you did by getting myself all ... [emotion]"*
>
> *"I've convinced myself that the reason for this [thing] happening is..."*
>
> *"I've allowed my insecurities to make me think that..."*
>
> *"I caught myself thinking that..."*

Our Desperate Need for Blame

When you try to use this responsible type of language, you're going to experience internal resistance. You'll feel a desperate need to blame someone, something, *anything*, rather than accept that you are the complete cause-and-effect system in your inner universe. It all begins and ends within your own mind — you are your own

god. There's no need to prevent this resistance to responsibility because you can speak about *the resistance* itself, and by doing so you will be taking responsibility for it.

I'll often say to my wife something like, "I'm feeling stressed right now and notice myself trying to find a reason to blame it on you." In this way I don't avoid acknowledging the resistance to responsibility, which would mean heading toward dishonesty. I talk about my petty tendency to place blame because that's the most accurate way to describe my current inner experience. You can speak about any dark shit going on inside you without having to first convince yourself that you're justified in feeling that way, or even that it's 'wrong' to feel that way.

People will relax in your presence when you take responsibility, because there will be no more blame, accusations, requests, or pressured obligations. You will be simply sharing your worldview with them, giving them something to observe without pressuring them to manage it for you. Most of the resistance you'll ever face during a confrontation comes from the other person taking personally what you're saying because they're feeling blamed; often, this is due to your victim-like language. When you express yourself as being responsible for your own reactions, even if the other person's behaviour was deplorable, they'll be far more open to taking responsibility for their own behaviour because there is no authority figure bearing down on them and pressuring them to defend themselves. You can lead the way and be a role-model: you can practice responsibility by using honesty to show that your pain is caused by your perception and attitude.

Note: You take responsibility only for your internal reaction, not for what happens to you or around you. While it's your job to manage your being upset about someone's behaviour, it's on them to manage their behaviour. You're allowed to be upset and think their behaviour sucks. It might even be totally helpful to get upset, as your values are telling you that you've been disrespected. You can still express this without blaming or being a victim. Simply express your reaction as a narrative — feedback for them to consider. Your reaction is yours; what they did to you is theirs.

If, for example, you were abused as a child, it wasn't your fault

that it happened to you, but it is your responsibility to manage your recovery from the trauma. They did something awful to you, sure, and your traumatic response was beyond your control, but your reaction to it is yours to own and manage, and you should speak of it as such. This may include asking for support. Asking for support is still being responsible, but demanding that your recovery is handled by someone else is not. The abuser is responsible for their behaviour and must face the consequences of it, but it's not their job to help you with your trauma (e.g. by apologizing or admitting guilt). You can't rely on someone else to manage your pain, or you'll be trapped in victimhood forever.

As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, the truth is partly formed by how you express it. If you express yourself as a victim, you become one. If you express yourself using responsible language, like saying, "He abused me and I will do what it takes to process my trauma so that I can get to a level of acceptance, and prove to myself that I can endure anything," the very words themselves will keep you focused on what is truthfully helpful and controllable for your improved quality of life. Free yourself from slavery by taking ownership of your life. Take ownership by speaking as the creator of your life.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Responsibility means taking ownership for anything that's true about you, whether you caused it or not.
- Responsibility is not the same as blame. Blame says, "Who caused this?" while responsibility says, "What am I going to do about it?"
- Use language that talks mostly about you, not some external thing — talk about your beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and other reactions to the thing, rather than the thing itself.
- Take care with the "because" part of what you say, whether you use that word or not — that's where responsibility or blame is decided. Responsibility means knowing that the "because" is about you, not something else.
- Nobody *makes* you think or feel anything. Blame language is inaccurate — it's your own mind that causes your reactions.

KEY ACTIONS

- Make a list of all the things that you tend to talk about in a blaming way — common everyday events that harm you or bring you pleasure.
- Practice speaking about these things on your own while using responsible language — *own* the experiences rather than attributing the cause of your reaction to something outside yourself.

The 2nd Principle of Powerful Honesty: Boldness

"I yam what I yam."

Popeye

Take Your Place

Bold honesty is all about expressing what you have to say as strongly, directly and concisely as possible. In the simplest terms, it means speaking *slowly, loudly* and *proudly*, while using the minimal amount of words needed to convey the truth. Slowness means that you take your time, avoid rushing and ranting, and give each word its own space to exist, no matter how your audience is reacting. Loudness means projecting the volume and the tone of your voice strongly enough that the listener has no choice but to hear you (without resorting to shouting), while reducing your tendency to hesitate, mumble, or speak toward the ground. And pride is about delivering what you say as though it's the most important thing in the world, avoiding sugar-coating, indirect language, and moderating your true thoughts, feelings and intentions. Give it to them hard, straight and true.

Powerful people boldly take their place in the universe without apologizing or seeking acceptance from others. They seek only their own acceptance, and place that as a priority over being judged as convenient or appropriate in the eyes of others. They know that the pressure to be apologetic, polite, socially acceptable, and soft in their expressions is just a manipulation by the authority figures in their lives who conditioned them to follow these rituals as a means to control them. Most of all, bold people know that being honest will require

polarizing others: not everyone will like the cut of your jib, and there's no point in pursuing something as pointless and as unobtainable as approval from others through diluting your expression.

Easier said than done, of course.

Boldness Creates Worthiness

It's challenging to boldly present your truth if you don't already feel genuine self-acceptance, or you're worried about the approval of others. It can be hard to speak boldly when you feel timid and ashamed — it may even feel fake to do so. Let's address this potentially confusing point first. You may have the belief that *you need to first feel worthy* before you can express yourself in a bold way that implies worthiness. For example, you may feel that it's fake for you to proudly say something like: "That's just the way I am, take it or leave it," especially if you believe that the way you are is shameful, inconvenient, and different from what is socially accepted. The trick is understanding that you must speak boldly first, and *then* you'll feel worthy.

Until you speak powerfully, the idea of self-worth remains only an unexpressed idea and therefore non-existent in any measurable form. You can't hope to feel good about yourself until *after* you start speaking with self-accepting language. Bold honesty can change what feels shameful inside your head into an acceptable truth once expressed, like when you feel shy to say something but then as soon as it comes out, you realise that you are fine with it. As you become more loud, slow and proud, you'll notice an increase in certainty about what you are expressing, and eventually in who you are as a person. And you'd be surprised at how you're perceived; there's a cognitive bias known as *the spotlight effect* which makes people feel that their insecurities are far more obvious to observers than they actually are. In other words, you might feel hesitant, shy and nervous, but it probably doesn't show as much as you think it does.

You don't have to 'believe in yourself' to speak boldly. In fact, you may not be able to build self-worth until after you start expressing

yourself more boldly. When you speak with noticeable volume and a steady pace while maintaining strong eye-contact and a straight back, you take up space in the world, both physically and mentally. Only someone of worth can take up space, therefore someone taking up space *is* a person of worth. I promise you: you'll actually feel a difference in self-worth through changing your manner of expression to something bolder.

Let the Judgments Flow Forth

Why don't we take up space? Why are so many of us meek, unnoticeable, quiet, falsely gentle, and restrained in our expression? Because taking up space gets *attention*, which many of us are afraid of (because it invites critical feedback). You can only get rejected, criticized, judged and punished *after* you've been noticed. Bold honesty will get you noticed. You will be seen, your opinions will be heard, and you'll be inviting people to judge you, warts 'n all. Being noticed is scary, but it is also the stepping stone toward great inner and social confidence. When you allow yourself to take up space and be judged, you give yourself recognition. The more recognition you give yourself, the less important the opinions of others will seem.

Polarizing self-acceptance language is about presenting your truth in a way that supports your right to exist. 'Polarizing' refers to the inevitable consequence of presenting yourself boldy: some people are going to resist and react negatively, and they might even dislike you personally. Some people want to believe that you're less than them, so they won't like being spoken to as if they are equals. Others will even believe that you're better than they are, and they'll struggle to accept language that brings them up to your level. You might, for example, boldly express the dark way you sometimes feel about yourself as if it's a normal human experience (which it is), however people who wish to avoid acknowledging their own self-worth dramas will challenge you, confront you, and possibly leave you. You will inevitably polarize certain people away from you when you present yourself as an acceptable human being who does not tolerate disrespect.

You may already have memorably painful experiences where you boldly let people see you for who you are and they reacted with negativity (although most people actually receive negative reactions because they're *not* bold in their expression). Powerful people don't avoid this by using manipulation like everyone else. Instead, they *embrace* it. You will too, once you get used to it. When you boldly express yourself as a person worthy of being alive and taking up space, no matter your faults, you will be forced to confront anyone who disagrees with your worth. At first, you may be shitting bricks at the idea of taking your rightful place in this world and allowing others to bitch about it. That's OK: it takes a while to get used to being worthy. But once you get a lick of it, wow, it tastes pretty damn good!

Let's have a look at some examples of truths being expressed, first as low-worth, approval-seeking statements, and then reframed as bold honesty; polarizing self-acceptance and worthy proclamations:

> *"I suck at my job"* becomes:
>
> *"I'm finding more and more that my job is a bad fit for me, because I tend to feel Imposter Syndrome when I'm there and am not motivated to try hard."*
>
> *"What would you like for dinner? I'm good with whatever"* becomes:
>
> *"I'm keen for pizza tonight, cool?"*
>
> *"Yeah I can see your point, there's always two sides to the story"* becomes:
>
> *"I can understand your point of view and it's simply incorrect."*
>
> *"Um... sorry, but I think that's my seat?"* becomes:
>
> *"Hey bro, you're in the wrong seat."*
>
> *"I promise I'll try to change, I should've explained myself better"* becomes:
>
> *"Looks like we both had some friction and misunderstandings there, let's work together on communication changes that will improve this relationship."*

Low-Worth Speech Patterns

To simplify this, there are some basic language changes you can make instantly to break your pattern of creating low self-worth through bad habits of weak self-expression.

Firstly, stop apologizing *completely* for a few weeks. This doesn't mean that the word 'sorry' will never again feature in your vocabulary. It's more about getting to a point where it doesn't mean "I'm sorry for being alive". Instead of apologizing all the time, boldly express how you feel about the incident and then focus on helping the affected people through the healing process by engaging in behaviour that redeems you. You'll find there's never really a need to say sorry: just show that you learned from your mistake by correcting it, or that you're in fact OK with your behaviour and it's now on them to get over it — whichever is most true at the time. Sometimes, it's a strange mixture of both, and that's also OK and totally human.

Another getting-started rule to bold honesty and polarizing self-acceptance is to eliminate the words "should have / shouldn't have" or "could have / couldn't have." These are fictional words. You can never use them to describe something objectively truthful. Go ahead, try to use these words to describe something that happened or is happening in real-life. You can't, can you? You can't say, "You should have eaten breakfast" to a guy who's actually eating breakfast. You can only describe fictional, imagined scenarios in your mind — possible alternatives that never actually took place, none of which are true in the slightest (even though your mind will argue that they are 'reasonable' to expect).

Using 'should' and 'could' about yourself — e.g. "I should have done something else" — automatically reduces acceptance of yourself. It says, "I'm not good enough." But the fact is, those alternative realities never happened, period. However, you can boldly and accurately say something like, "I'm engaging in wishful thinking right now: I am thinking of some different way I wish I had behaved, but of course this is just a fantasy and the truth is I behaved the way I did, so let's move forward with that." That's much more bold and unapologetic than saying, "I shouldn't have done that, boo hoo!"

Here are some examples of reframing apologetic and imaginary language into bold factual language:

> *"I'm sorry I hit your car, I shouldn't have been speeding"* becomes:
>
> *"Looks like my driving sucks today! Let's exchange insurance information so I can get you fixed up as soon as possible. I hope you're not injured."*
>
> *"Sorry I made you feel that way, I shouldn't have done that"* becomes:
>
> *"I can see that what I did was painful for you. I have a tendency to act impulsively, it's just how I am sometimes. How can I help you deal with this?"*
>
> *"It's totally my fault, I should have known better"* becomes:
>
> *"Whoops, that was a mistake. Guess I'll know better next time — lesson learned!"*

Express Yourself as A Bold Fact

You don't say, "That tree should be greener and leafier," you just say, "That's a tree." You can talk about yourself like this, too. For many of you, bold expression of yourself will be the most powerful change you can possibly make with your language. When I started expressing who I was as a neutral fact, rather than as an inadequate mistake (compared to some fictional fantasy-person whom I wished to be), my self-acceptance naturally grew. Yes, I still engage in behaviours that cause me to feel shame, like stressing out over minor inconveniences, masturbating to pornography, and bingeing on sugar. The difference nowadays is that I don't compare myself to a more perfect version of me that exists only in an imaginary alternate universe. *I am what I am*, at any given moment, and the most accurate thing to talk about is that real version of myself, with the same bold conciseness that I would apply to expressing any factual statements.

Some examples of speaking of yourself as a fact:

> *"Yeah I'm just like that sometimes, it's best you get used to it."*
>
> *"I'm a perfect combination of smart and stupid — you never know which one I'm gonna be next. That's the fun!"*
>
> *"Looks like I won't be getting it up tonight. It's this performance anxiety thing I get with a girl I'm not familiar with. No worries, I guess tonight's going to be all about your pleasure. Lucky you!"*

Think of times where you're shamelessly bold when speaking. Maybe it's when someone who you trust and feel comfortable with asks you how you're feeling. Maybe it's when you're talking shit to your gaming buddies online, or when you're arguing about sports picks with your dad. Notice *how* you speak when you're at your most bold, and then apply that same style of speaking to everything you express, especially those things you tend to express in a weaker or more shy manner.

For example, I noticed that I had a tendency to use a gentle 'baby voice' when speaking to children and customers (my pitch would go up and my volume and bass would go down), and I didn't really know why I did this, other than it was non-confrontational. So, as an experiment, I switched to talking to them as if they were my best friends, allowing some bass into my voice and no longer moderating my vocabulary to be more acceptable. Interestingly, both children and customers respond more positively to me when I speak boldly than when I try to be appropriate, gentle or safe.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Always remember: Loud, slow and proud.
- Learn to speak about everything as if you're talking about something you're certain of and unashamed of standing behind. This is not about being fake, it's about deciding that your truth is worthwhile by presenting it as such.
- Being bold doesn't mean being unwilling to budge or being judgmental. It simply means giving what you believe, think and feel to people as straightforwardly as possible.
- Talk about yourself as a fact, rather than as less or more than some imagined other self.

KEY ACTIONS

- Catch yourself apologising this week, and try to replace it with simply expressing a feeling of guilt (or nothing at all if you're not really remorseful).
- Make a video or audio recording of yourself talking about everything you consider to be a personal 'weakness' or flaw, and try to use polarising and bold self-worth language when you talk about it, as if it's completely normal (it should sound like you're talking about the weather or what you had for breakfast — just facts without judgment).

The 3rd Principle of Powerful Honesty: Vulnerability

"Quality is never an accident. It is always the result of intelligent effort."

John Ruskin

Vulnerability is in The Details

You'll have noticed in the examples given throughout the last few chapters that the wording tends to get longer and more descriptive when I'm trying to be powerfully honest. This is no coincidence. Accuracy requires more effort and detail than dishonest or weak forms of expression. Accuracy, by definition, cannot be vague. The most convincing lies often lack detail and specifics — too much detail and you get tripped up later when trying to remember it all. Details make you vulnerable to being discovered. Providing richer detail while describing your reality increases the accuracy, which means that you are more 'vulnerable' since you are clearly committed to a specific point of view, so you can be more easily challenged. When you vaguely categorize, cut corners, stereotype, or oversimplify, you avoid vulnerability by slipping back into the weaker end of the honesty spectrum, which means you're less vulnerable but also less confident and more difficult to connect with.

There's a reason people avoid putting effort into expressing themselves accurately: it keeps them *safe*. Sure, some people may babble on and make a lot of noise, but if you listen closely you'll notice that they are repeating themselves in various ways, or they're creating a complicated word-salad to avoid talking directly about a simple, vulnerable truth. Whether it's making a lot of pointless noise

and beating around the bush (without revealing vulnerable details) or it's avoiding expression and withdrawing into silence, I've found that the main reason people don't put effort into detailed descriptive language is because doing so makes them feel unsafe, or 'vulnerable'. The more detail I give you, the more there is for you to react to, thereby increasing the chance that you will become offended or angry. If there's more for you to get upset about, then there are more reasons that might cause you to leave me, and most importantly, less chance for me to back-pedal or safely restate what I've said.

Let's say I'm grieving because my girlfriend has betrayed my trust, and I wish to tell a guy-friend about it. If I say something vague like, "I'm a bit depressed," I've protected myself by creating wiggle-room to change the meaning of my words. If my mate reacts with macho derision, judging me for being 'emotional', I can just back out by saying, "Na, what I meant was: I wish the Warriors had won the game last night." However, if instead I were to put some effort in and accurately state, "I've been frequently experiencing these overwhelming waves of sadness and depression since I found out that Jane has been talking shit about me to her mother, and I'm lost about how to recover," then there's no way for me to back out. If my mate mocks me, I'll just have to deal with his judgment — I'm fully committed now. Saying "Just kidding" can't save me anymore. This is the risk of vulnerability through using greater detail, and it's a risk you *must* take if you want to become truly confident and create deep connections.

Powerfully confident people take this risk in order to respect their integrity. You'll come to understand that vulnerability — the art of sharing deeper and more detailed truths that reveal your darkness and shame — actually protects you, and is not really a risk at all in the long-run. If I hide my darkness, I'm always at risk of it being discovered against my will. If you commit a crime and are caught, you get punished much more harshly than when you willingly confess and take responsibility *before* being caught. Vulnerability is about making it impossible for people to 'find out' your secrets, by revealing them first and thereby neutralizing any fear you have about being discovered, as well as ensuring you cannot be manipulated (a person with no secrets is impossible to blackmail). Revealing these secrets in a powerful way is all about focusing on the vulnerable details.

"Deep and Meaningfuls"

You might think you're saving the other person time and hassle by cutting down the description of your internal experience. We live in a global online culture where emotions are expressed with tiny 'emoji' pictures of sad and happy faces. You may feel pressured to oversimplify your experience for the sake of brevity and social acceptance. Yet, you can't blame society for your choice to censor yourself. The truth is that you're afraid of revealing all that detail and cutting yourself loose from the vagueness safety-net. You're afraid of being seen as weird, different, politically incorrect, socially awkward, or emotionally vulnerable. More detail means exposing your uniqueness and beliefs, with an increased chance of standing out and rocking the boat. Powerfully honest people *embrace* the negative reactions that sometimes come from being unique, because it's evidence that they have achieved a high level of authenticity (though some people do just overshare to get attention — we'll look at that issue later).

When I used to take drugs recreationally, my friends and I would often have what we called "deep and meaningfuls". These rare, in-depth discussions about how we felt and how we saw the world would significantly surpass the usual limits of vulnerability we were limited to during sober conversations, which were usually just about cars and girls and bullshit banter. We credited this more intense level of sharing to the drugs. We *blamed* the drugs for "making us emotional" so that we could secretly continue to connect in a real way without getting bullied for it. When you're drunk or high, you become disinhibited and finally release a richer description of how you truly feel because you're artificially pumped with 'confidence chemicals' (and you know you can blame it on the substances later). A powerfully honest person doesn't need chemical support to do this because they're already willing to be judged.

Here are some examples of adding richer detail to normal everyday statements to make them more vulnerable, i.e. more powerfully honest:

"Yeah I had a good weekend," becomes:

"Saturday started off well, but then my mother-in-law started hectoring me about having kids and it spoiled my good mood..."

"I'm hungry," becomes:

"I just got a craving for Indian food, probably because I smelled Rakesh's lunch cooking."

"Wanna get a coffee sometime?" becomes:

"I find myself increasingly attracted to you, and would love to spend more time getting to know you."

"Yeah, I had a pretty rough childhood" becomes:

"I was sexually abused by my step-father, and I carry those wounds with me every day."

"Yeah, John's a good guy," becomes:

"I admire John for his leadership, resilience and patience; if I have a son one day I'll be stoked if he's half the man John is."

Showing Intentions and Breaking Down The Parts

To express your truth in a more vulnerable way, start breaking down information and describing its working parts. This will take an effort: you'll need to think through things and dive deeper into the core of what you're trying to say. This is about answering the question, "What am I *really* trying to convey here?" There are a few practical ways to do this, and I find two of them helpful in particular: *showing your intentions*, and *breaking things down into parts.*

Showing your intentions means revealing *why* you are expressing what you say. So often we hide what we want (or don't want) behind a vague question or statement, using our words as a strategy to secretly manipulate or manoeuvre people during an interaction. For

example, I might ask my wife, "What would you like for dinner?" but the truth is that I'm trying to assess if we can have chicken for dinner, which is what I really want. So, to increase the vulnerability, I can then add, "The reason I ask is because I'm keen on chicken but I want you to choose for yourself, too."

Start telling people why you say what you say: reveal the secret goal you're trying to accomplish, and you'll notice that deeper (and more playful) connections instantly occur. Tell them that you're trying to convince them and move them, or that you are trying to gain their attention, sympathy and recognition. Just reveal the intention, *neutralize it*, and show them you're a real human with neediness and longings. Ironically, you'll often find that this is much more persuasive than indirect manipulation.

Here are some examples of showing your intentions (imagine saying these with a cheeky grin):

> *"What do you feel like doing tonight? The reason I ask is because I'm secretly hoping that you'll want to stay in and watch movies with me, but I don't want you to think that I'm a boring old man, so you have to suggest it."*
>
> *"I'd like to tell you that you look pretty in that dress so that you'll feel good about me and be willing to kiss me later on. It works in the movies, so I figure I'd give it a shot."*
>
> *"I want to convince you to work harder on this project without thinking I'm a mean boss. Is there some passive-aggressive way I can use to motivate you here? I'm aiming to somehow get results while still being seen as the fun boss."*

The other strategy — breaking things into parts — means first realizing that most of what you say is essentially a *summary* of processes and events. You can describe an entire day's events as "good," and the complex web of fluctuating emotions you feel as "bad." These summaries are vague and tell the listener nothing of value about you. A "good" day is actually a variety of events that can range from painful to boring to enjoyable. A "bad" feeling is a diverse tapestry of emotions, physical sensations, and thoughts. A single word or a short phrase can't do justice to a complex situation.

Start breaking down your experiences into their various parts and then express each part separately. Even just a little more detail goes a long way. A "good" day can be expanded to: "An enjoyable morning, followed by a stressful argument with my kids, and then a boring afternoon;" and a "bad" feeling can become: "A tense chest, a sense of anxiety, and an overwhelming list of thoughts running through my mind."

Here are some more examples of breaking vague summaries into parts, to add richer detail and be more vulnerable:

> *"I'm anxious,"* becomes:
>
> *"My heart is beating out of my chest and my mind is racing with fear right now."*
>
> *"Good work!"* becomes:
>
> *"I particularly like the way you carried the brush strokes over the yellow plain, while keeping the trees more solid and robust for contrast."*
>
> *"That movie sucked!"* becomes:
>
> *"While I enjoyed the part where Brad Pitt smashed all the hippies, the rest of the movie progressed at a snail's pace for me, and I was struggling to follow the storyline and the point of the whole thing, so I lost interest about halfway through."*

Yes, You Can Also Keep it Simple

All that being said, sometimes what you need to say is best expressed in simple terms, like saying, "I'm in love with you" or "Enough of this shit." I don't want you to think that you must become a long-winded poet in order to express yourself vulnerably. Vague or simple expressions of truth are still far better than dishonest ones, and conciseness is vital to a well-balanced interaction.

Start with whatever detail you're capable of right now, and build from there. You can introduce a simple concept and then decide if

you need to add detail once you get a reaction. I once saw a friend give the most concise speech I've ever heard, for his girlfriend's twenty-first birthday: "You still make me nervous." Every girl listening instantly melted. Nothing more needs to be said: sometimes it's beautiful and accurate when it's simple, too. However, most of the time, people hide behind vagueness, which is not the same thing as being concise or simple. The vulnerable truth must be revealed for it to count as powerful honesty. So if you're keeping it simple, make sure the main, vulnerable truth is still revealed.

Sometimes, vague statements can be used as a starting platform on which you build toward a more vulnerable description during an ongoing interaction. Often, I'll start by stating simple truths and then I'll add detail and layers as I continue the conversation. I might say to my wife something vague like, "I'm sad." Then, once she's responded, I'll go into more detail about the parts of sadness and how or why I've become sad (and why I want her to know) as we converse back and forth. It might take an entire conversation to get to the point where there's vulnerable accuracy being expressed, and that's why I say that you need to put in the effort. Part of the truth is formed as you speak, it's only half-baked inside your head, so speak first and clarify later.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- People reduce the amount of details and specifics when sharing uncomfortable truths in order to avoid committing to the real expression. Confident people ensure there's no room for misinterpretation, by getting it all out there.
- When your expressions are vague and lacking in detail, you're probably trying to stay safe. Powerful honesty is detailed, even when it's simple. Don't hide behind vagueness: let them see the whole picture.
- How you describe yourself while you're drunk, high, or otherwise disinhibited probably gives you clues as to how much you usually hold back while sober.
- *Describe* instead of summarizing complex events and feelings into single words or short phrases. Try talking about the different parts and range of experiences within them.
- Simple and short statements can sometimes give the best accuracy, but often there's much more to the story if you're willing to risk being vulnerable.

KEY ACTIONS

- Put more effort into sharing this week — try to give people a richer experience through added detail. Instead of giving them basic statements, like "I'm fine" or "Yeah, it was a good weekend," try to give them a fuller story with descriptions of emotions, thoughts and actions.

The 4th Principle of Powerful Honesty: Cosmic Perspective

"Not enough people in this world, I think, carry a cosmic perspective with them. It could be life-changing."

Neil deGrasse Tyson

Trying Different Views

The position from which you view something will change the way you describe it. Your perspective on any issue determines the language you use to express yourself. At any given time, and in any situation, I can choose the perspective I want to view my world from. I can view myself as the victim or the protagonist, the observer or the participant, the optimist or the pessimist. The perspective, and the role I choose to engage in, will have a huge impact on the words I use to express my inner experience.

If I choose to take up the role of the helpless victim or the gloomy pessimist, I will be more likely to use weaker language that is depressing and pathetic, and therefore reduce the respectability of my honesty. If I take a victim perspective when describing a completely neutral situation, like getting a flat tire, it might sound as if the universe has targeted me personally for destruction, and that my life is worse than the lives of others — "I can't believe I got a flat tire, it's so unfair, terrible things always happen to me." People who hear me speak like this might judge me as being entitled, draining or repulsive. And when I hear myself speak, I further ingrain my sense of powerlessness.

I can describe the same incident from a different perspective without reducing my honesty. I could just as easily take on the role of

observer, which would sound more like this: "I got a flat tire on the way to work, and because I'd gotten myself all stressed out about it I felt anxious for the next 30 minutes. I really dug my own grave there! Thank god I got over it." Notice how the observer sounds more powerful than the victim. And all I needed to do in order to engage with this power was to change my perspective. I went from being the victim of a flat tire to being an observer *watching* a guy with a flat tire as he deals with an entirely human emotional reaction.

In this chapter, we're going to explore three different perspectives and demonstrate how the language changes with each. We'll compare the weaker (less respectable), unhelpful viewpoints with the perspectives that powerfully honest people tend to choose. Essentially, we'll try to view the world through the eyes of a confident person and compare that with the view of an insecure person, to see how that changes language choices even though both are being honest.

The Powerless Victim vs The Responsible Protagonist

The victim-perspective is centred around the central concept of *blame*. Not only does a Victim focus on what they are *not* getting out of life and how unfair life is to them, they are also obsessed with explaining why this is all someone's fault. Even when they blame themselves, they are still looking for a reason why their life sucks more than the lives of other people. This also explains why the Victim is powerless to change their situation. The victim-perspective is about maintaining a helplessness narrative, turning aside all responsibility and passing the buck onto something outside of their conscious control, whether that thing is inside their own mind (e.g. "I'm addicted to food, I can't stop myself") or outside of themselves (e.g. "The government tax on healthy foods means I must eat at McDonalds, I have no choice with my budget").

Confident and responsible people never bother with blame, nor do they spend much of their energy trying to figure out why

something went wrong (beyond what's needed to figure out the solution). Instead, they are constantly exploring better options, opportunities and solutions. This perspective is available to you at any time you please. Responsible Protagonists — people who see themselves as the hero in their life-story — ask themselves: "What should I do about it?" and express themselves according to this perspective. They talk of solutions, possibilities, and accurate reflections on what they *can* control (whereas Victims focus almost exclusively on what they cannot control). In an instant, you can transform yourself from a helpless victim into a powerful protagonist, simply by changing your perspective and the language that goes with it. If a Responsible Protagonist is overeating, they talk about how they could better manage their nutrition. If they can't afford healthy food, they'll talk about their plans to make more money. And they are no less honest or truthful than Victims.

A Victim's language choices keeps them helpless. When they say, "It's impossible," they actually make whatever it is impossible — they have focused only on what is outside of their control and therefore cannot control anything. When a responsible person says, "Well, at the very least I could try x, y and z," then those possibilities become the focus, freeing the hero to move forward. Both the Victim and the Protagonist are being honest, it's just that the Protagonist's focus on responsibility means that their honesty opens up options, whereas the Victim's language closes them down.

Here are some examples of language choices based on the closed-down victim-perspective being translated into high-possibility Protagonist-speak:

> *"I can't afford it,"* becomes:
>
> *"I need to find a way to drum up some cash so I can do this."*
>
> *"It's too hard and I'm too stupid to do it,"* becomes:
>
> *"This is fuckin' challenging! It's almost beaten me but I'm going to smash through it even if it kills me."*
>
> *"I'm just unlucky,"* becomes:

"I've had a string of tough challenges come my way recently and it's taking all my endurance to get through them, but I'm surviving — that's the important thing."

"I would do it, but I have to wait for my parents to do their part first," becomes:

"My parents aren't doing their part quickly enough, so I'll need to switch to Plan B."

The Participant vs The Observer

A Participant is someone who can't see the forest for the trees. They see themselves as unable to assert any influence over their lives. They tend to *identify* with the situation they're in, be it an internal situation like emotional agitation (e.g. "I am anxious"), or an external situation like a workplace dilemma (e.g. "I can't do anything because my boss is too scary"). When they describe their experience, you get a sense that they *are* their experience, such as the subtle difference between "I am sad" and "I've been feeling some sadness this morning."

Participants tend to describe their situation as absolute and untouchable, often adding a fatalistic flavour to their language. They don't look beyond their own current drama, so everything often sounds extreme and overwhelming and massively important. Everything sounds like a big deal because whatever is happening right now is described from the perspective of someone who is stuck *inside* the situation, like someone drowning as they are rolled beneath pounding waves in the surf. There is no sense of anything else happening.

The Observer distances themselves from that powerless viewpoint. Firstly, they comment on everything from a detached perspective, as one who is observing the event rather than being stuck inside the event, like a narrator describing a scene to an audience. This does not mean that they are apathetic or unaffected by life, it's simply a perspective that allows for the most accuracy. They can identify as

being both the participant and the observer of the participant. They experience their life but also simultaneously witness themselves experiencing it. This detachment is like a father watching his son battle through a tough sports game. The father can feel for the son's disappointment when he misses the goal, but he can also lovingly smile because he understands that his disappointment will pass with time. This detachment is compassionate and loving, and it prevents one from being overwhelmed by the current experience.

And secondly, the Observer has the cosmic perspective — they try to always keep one eye on the greater picture of all life. They understand that whatever is happening right now is but a tiny part of all existence, and so they speak of it as a passing moment rather than a permanent state. The Observer remembers to add "...right now" to any painful situation, to remind themselves that it can't be that bad forever. Think of the subtle but significant difference between "I am sad" and "I am feeling sad right now." The Observer knows that everything is temporary and just a tiny part of the big picture. Powerless Participants, on the other hand, talk about everything as if it's permanent and fatal.

I find this difference easier to describe through examples. Here are some examples of language choices observed by a confident and detached witness:

> *"I'm so angry!"* becomes:
>
> *"I can feel myself really giving in to my rage right now. I must have taken something personally. I do this from time to time when certain topics get raised, but I always get over it eventually."*
>
> *"My job is ruining my life,"* becomes:
>
> *"I've noticed that for the last few weeks I consistently come home from work in a bad mood, which suggests that maybe I struggle with staying at my current job."*
>
> *"I don't know what to do"* becomes:
>
> *"I haven't figured out a solution yet, but I'm still alive so things aren't as bad as they could be."*

"If my partner doesn't show up soon, I'm totally screwed," becomes:

"I'm feeling some panic at the thought of doing this alone, although there's nothing physically hurting me right now."

The Pessimist vs The Optimist

Before we get into this one, understand that when I claim that optimistic language is more powerful than pessimistic, for honest expression, I don't mean that you must *pretend* to be optimistic. I mean that you should try to take the optimistic viewpoint when expressing yourself honestly if you'd like to build up your confidence. There is no conflict between being a pessimist and yet expressing yourself optimistically. I can pessimistically conclude that a situation is not going well, yet still adopt an optimistic framework and look at what my options are, and express myself from this viewpoint. Also, being optimistic does not mean the same as being *hopeful*, particularly not in this book. Being optimistic doesn't mean hoping that things go well, or having blind faith in a prediction of a positive future. When I talk about optimism, I am talking about a framework that allows you to focus on the best parts of a situation — the opportunities and successes to be grateful for — based on *real evidence*. Wishful thinking is not required.

Pessimistic language is the language of hopelessness and pointlessness. While a pessimistic viewpoint may simply be an acknowledgement of pain, frustration and even our inevitable death, pessimistic language speaks of these things as if there are no options, opportunities or viable responses available that are worth considering. Pessimistic language gives you a sense of negative fatalism, like everything is already decided and therefore there's no reason to actively participate. For example, pessimists might say, "We're all just going to die anyway, so what's the point?" While an optimist can respond accurately with: "Yes, we are all going to die, but that doesn't mean there's no point to anything. Let's make the most of it while we can". Who's to say that this is any less honest?

Optimistic language is all about focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses, opportunities rather than impossibilities, and things to be grateful for rather than things to complain about. It's about looking for what can be done about a problem rather than focusing on the negative consequences this problem brings about. Optimism acknowledges the 'bad' things in life, but sees them as opportunities for noble reactions — chances to test your honour and live by your values. Where pessimism is flaccid or passive, optimism is assertive. You'll notice a sense of power inside yourself when you speak honestly about what you can and ought to control, and you'll notice a sense of creeping nihilistic dread when you speak only about what you can't control.

Here are some examples of language choices being converted from pessimistic to optimistic language. Remember, you can maintain a pessimistic belief without having to speak from a pessimistic viewpoint:

> *"President Trump is ruining this country and there's nothing we can do about it"* becomes:
>
> *"No matter whom we have as president, it's on each of us as individuals to step up and live with integrity, particularly when our leaders fail to model good behaviour."*
>
> *"Even if I try my best, my boss doesn't give a shit"* becomes:
>
> *"With such a hands-off boss, I must work to serve my own values rather than trying to get her approval."*
>
> *"Oh great, more bad weather"* becomes:
>
> *"I guess we're staying in. Finally, a chance to finish writing that chapter on perspectives that I'd been procrastinating on."*
>
> *"She's got a boyfriend, there's no point in talking to her"* becomes:
>
> *"Thankfully, she's got a boyfriend. Now I can talk to her without being all nervous about how it's going to work out."*

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- The power of your honesty can often be boiled down to the viewpoint you choose to take when expressing a situation or experience.
- Victim's look for an opportunity to blame and remove the possibility for their own power in a situation, whereas Protagonists talk about what they can and should control.
- Participants can only express what it's like to be in the situation, while Observers talk about everything — even their own emotions — from a detached and wise third-party perspective.
- Pessimistic language focuses on what is wrong and what is impossible, while optimistic language focuses on what *can* be done; the opportunities and possibilities.

KEY ACTIONS

- Choose a perspective change that you think you need to try out, and for the next twenty-four hours stop and think before speaking, so you can practice using it in all your conversations and expressions.

The 5th Principle of Powerful Honesty: Reciprocation

"There are many benefits to this process of listening. The first is that good listeners are created as people feel listened to. Listening is a reciprocal process — we become more attentive to others if they have attended to us."

Margaret J. Wheatley

How Much Do I Say?

Choosing what to say, in order to be as honest as possible, is more of an art than a science, like choosing which notes to play on a flute in order to create the music you want others to hear. Dozens of thoughts, urges, emotions and ideas race through your mind every minute, giving you hundreds of options regarding what to express at any given moment. Expressing *everything* is simply impossible. So one of the most frequent dilemmas that will arise as you embark on this powerful honesty language journey is: "How much do I have to say to qualify as being honest?"

Some people think that being completely honest means blurting out every thought that enters their mind, so they become afraid of oversharing and scaring people away with too much information. Others convince themselves that very little about their internal experience is worth sharing, so they become limited and scarce in their selection about what to express, i.e. they undershare. How do we determine the 'correct' amount of information to share? At what point are we supposed to stop?

In my previous book, *Nothing to Lose*, I introduced you to the 3X Model of Confidence. This model originally began as a blueprint for

an ideal conversation, based on my observations of best friends and loving partners talking shamelessly with each other. Phase one — Explore — was about carefully thinking of what you're going to say next, making an effort to choose the most important and honest observation to comment on. Phase two — Engage — was about speaking as honestly, accurately and succinctly as possible, sharing one full truth but going no further. And phase three — Release — was about identifying the limit of what you will honestly share this time around; where you choose to stop speaking and listen attentively without trying to think of something to say next until the other person has completely finished sharing. The Release phase is what we're focusing on in this chapter.

Underlying all the powerful honesty principles covered in these chapters is a subtle guiding principle that we'll call *boundaries*. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to the question, "How much should I say?" as it depends on the context. If I were to shout out every thought that I am having while someone is trying to give a eulogy at a funeral, that would breach my value of respect. Yet, if I were to keep quiet when it's my turn to give a eulogy, that would also breach my value of respect. The correct amount lies somewhere in between. That line I draw between too much and not enough is a 'boundary'.

Context largely guides me on how much I should share and where I should draw the boundary. Is this a situation where it's on me to share more, or is it one where I'm more in the listener/receiver role? And there are other guidelines that will allow you to answer the "How much should I say?" question. These guidelines are all about trying to achieve *a balanced investment of honesty*, through setting and adhering to boundaries. As you observe people involved in the interaction, you will notice who is contributing and how much they are contributing to the conversation, not just in terms of quantity but also quality — *how* honest each person is being.

Investment, in a conversation as well as in any ongoing relationship, is all about how much one puts in. Investment can take the form of time, energy, trust, attention, depth of content, money and resources, quantity of words, and — the most relevant aspect — depth of honesty. Yes, there are a million things you *could* say to honestly express who you are, but how much you give will depend

somewhat on what the other person is also bringing to the table. If you're doing most of the sharing, you are over-invested; if the other person is doing most of the work, you are under-invested. A healthy, deep and genuine connection will only be achieved in a balanced sharing environment. This doesn't mean that you always say the same amount or go to the same level of honesty every single time you interact, but it does mean that — on average — you both feel equal, and try your best to achieve an equal average depth of sharing over time.

The Love Addict vs The Love Avoidant

'Love addicts' tend to chase and cling to partners and friends, and often do most of the work in a relationship because they are needy for love and approval. This inevitably leads them to disrespect other people's personal-space boundaries, while disrespecting themselves by over-investing. A love addict is usually someone who was significantly neglected in some way during childhood, which led them to form the belief that they are unlovable and always at risk of being abandoned. They tend to take it personally when being asked to give someone space, and view someone who is setting boundaries as being offensive and threatening, even if it is a reasonable request from someone who obviously loves and cares for them. When someone starts backing away from them, they panic and invest even harder, which only aggravates the imbalance and further pushes the other person away.

'Love avoidants' are basically the opposite. These are people who felt smothered, threatened or emotionally hurt by what passed for 'love' in their childhood, and they tend to have a panicky reaction to high investment from others and similar harbingers of a potentially deep connection. They perform to get attention and validation and love, but when they actually begin to receive what they've pursued they start to feel as if they are losing freedom, and they rebel against it. They keep people at arm's length through careful moderation of their investment and honesty. They find

people playing 'hard to get' exciting and attractive, but lose interest once the person submits to their seduction and shows interest in a commitment. Deep down, the love avoidant's real fear is of the emotional damage that someone else could do if allowed to get too close, like the damage they've received in the past from close people who violated their trust and boundaries.

And many people, of course, are *both*. They oscillate between being avoidant and addicted, choosing the safest reaction to potential social risks and threats based on the context. If, for example, you had parents who used to smother you with love while the kids at school ignored you, you probably developed opposing strategies to deal with each. You now apply these protective strategies to whomever either comes on too strong or plays hard to get. I have tendencies for both, which I've learned to manage through honesty. I used to feel panicky when my wife and I spent a lot of time together, yet I'd also feel needy if friends didn't invite me to an event. I've learned to recognise these avoidant and addict strategies, and mitigate them by simply speaking about them out loud and resisting their impulses.

Creating a Genuine Connection

A relationship, or even a single interaction, cannot grow to greater levels of connection without a balanced investment of expressed honesty — we'll call it *sharing*. If I'm doing most of the sharing and you don't match me, then I'm inevitably going to repulse you as I continually increase my investment and smother you with attention and neediness — the dilemma of when the love addict chases after a love avoidant. I can't achieve a higher level of honesty without your input because I'm limited by my own knowledge — it's just me sharing about me. However, if you contribute equally and we combine our truths together, a new form of being together comes into existence, a new truth. This is what we call a *connection*. We both understand each other and ourselves better because we share equally and receive new perspectives from each other. We've created something from nothing. There's now a clear sense of *togetherness*.

If I *overshare*, you will be forced to *undershare* in response. If I've taken up more than fifty percent of the available space, there's less than half available for you. Even if you wanted to match me, you couldn't. If I undershare, you'll either undershare as well, because you don't feel safe to open up to someone who will not match you (i.e. we'll have a superficial relationship), or you'll overshare in a desperate and needy attempt to drag more out of me, or to prevent awkward silences. If we can't find a balance then we can never feel like equals, and it's impossible to have a true connection with someone who feels 'more' or 'less' than you.

Let's look at this more practically in order to make sense of it. Let's say we're at the beach and I tell you, "I don't want to take my shirt off because I'm embarrassed about my body." Then you give me a blank look and respond by changing the subject because you're uncomfortable talking about this. I will now get embarrassed about my body whenever I'm around you, *and* I'll feel unable to share this kind of information with you because I'm worried that you won't understand and that you'll judge me. All the while, you're now feeling pressured to reduce the discomfort, perhaps by changing the subject or pretending you didn't hear me. Our friendship gets a little weaker in that moment, and a precedent for hiding how we feel is covertly set in place. This imbalance has hurt our connection.

Compare that to a different scenario, whereby instead of changing the subject, you share with me, "Yeah, I used to be overweight and would go home sweaty from high school Phys Ed just to avoid having to change in the gym with the other boys" (or any other real-life example where you felt similar shame). This revelation gives us both a instant sense of belonging — a realization that *we're not alone in our shame* — while we also see that we have something in common that we didn't know about before. The end result is a deeper friendship, a sense of belonging, and increased body-acceptance. We've created something more than what previously existed. And even if you don't have a comparative experience — maybe you've always loved your body without exception — you can still show basic empathy for my situation, expressing how you feel about what I've shared, and we can still bond and feel equally invested. Neither of us overshared nor held back, it was just right.

Are You an Undersharer or an Oversharer?

An undersharer hides the truth and masks their vulnerability by keeping quiet, asking questions, only sharing unimportant trivial information, or outright lying. They avoid contributing with anything deep. If you're an undersharer, you probably pride yourself in knowing a lot about other people because you're quietly listening or actively withholding information, yet you feel disconnected from people because they know hardly anything about you at all.

Undersharers can do quite 'well' socially since they are easy to be around. They create space for both oversharers and other undersharers alike. They also tend to play 'hard to get' which can be attractive to insecure people. However, they are almost incapable of forming deep and genuine connections. Essentially, an undersharer is hidden behind a wall that is often camouflaged to look like sharing (e.g. making a lot of noise but not revealing anything particularly deep) or attentive listening.

An oversharer, on the other hand, indiscriminately *pours* their deepest truth into almost any ear that strays into their orbit. They will make multiple points and often go off on tangents, and yet never quite get to the end of a story or concisely state their case. They can be known to dump their issues onto people without permission or without creating space to allow the other person to also vent. They avoid silence, desperately trying to fill it with *anything* rather than risking people feeling uncomfortable about having nothing to say.

People disconnect from listening to oversharers (it's just too much to take in), which only pushes the oversharer into a panic. Worried that they're not being interesting enough, they respond to being ignored by *sharing even more*. Oversharers try to reel in attention by throwing out as much conversational bait as possible. They thrive on you feeling obliged to politely respond. Eventually, the only people who will stick around are insecure undersharers, people-pleasers, fixers, controllers, and various other people who can't survive without following someone's lead or who thrive on hoarding

and using your personal information. Oversharers are likely to have a history of unhealthy friendships, and of being manipulated and abused because they attract psychopaths and narcissists.

Oversharers are trying to gain approval through *validation-begging*: throwing everything at the wall in the vain hope that something will stick. While they are more likely than undersharers to form deeper connections because they're more open, these are few and far between because most people simply can't handle their never-ending intensity. The only people who are truly compatible with oversharers are the 'fixer' types who thrive on drama and information-hoarding, or socially anxious and shy people who want someone else to lead and do all the work.

I've noticed that people tend toward one or the other as a basic default position. You're mostly either an undersharer (e.g. love avoidant) or an oversharer (e.g. love addict). I'm an undersharer by default. It's easier for me to withhold and hide than to open up. I have a friend who is on the other end of the spectrum; she can't seem to keep quiet about her problems and leaves me no space to counter-share when we talk. It's difficult for us to achieve a balance, we naturally fall into a pattern of me doing all the listening and her doing all the talking. Many people seem to be unable to consistently achieve a balance, probably because it's almost impossible unless you're with someone who is also trying to balance it out.

Breaking the Pattern

In order to achieve a balanced investment, two things need to occur: you both must set a precedent of balanced investment at the beginning of an interaction, and you both must continue to work at maintaining the balance once it's set up (i.e. the work is never done).

If you begin an interaction or relationship with clear expectations around shared investment, you'll naturally set a precedent that will likely maintain balance for quite some time. For example, if you're oversharing right from the outset of our conversation, I can

interrupt you with something like, "Hold on, I can't keep up! Let me touch on that first thing you said," thereby showing you how much I can handle before you need to stop. Then, if at any point this imbalance comes up again, I can simply say, "Wait, remember I can't handle that many different points at once," and we can have a laugh and relieve the tension caused by your oversharing.

Most people over/undershare at the beginning of a relationship, fail to address it head-on because they're trying to be polite, and then get themselves stuck in a pattern of imbalance by never talking about it. If one or both of you are not sharing the right amount for a connection, tackle it *early* so that it doesn't become a long-term rut. The longer it's allowed to continue, the more uncomfortable it becomes to address it. It's relatively easy to call it out at the beginning.

The simplest way to ensure that the balance is maintained is to create a pattern where each of you only ever shares *a single piece of truth* before giving the other person a turn to speak. Oversharing almost always involves making multiple points, like telling more than one story without stopping or adding unnecessary characters and subplots, while undersharing often reveals no truths about you at all. If you both, however, fall into a pattern of sharing one honest thing at a time, matching truth for truth, you will never become unbalanced. It's not so much about quantity — e.g. it may take me thirty seconds to tell you one truth and two minutes for you to tell me one — it's more about quality.

So, if you're an oversharer, try focusing on being *concise*. Keep your stories, anecdotes and feelings boiled down to the most salient points. Speak about one person at a time, one event at a time, one emotion at a time, etc. Don't wait for the listener to stop you: finish and go silent when the single point is made. Catch yourself adding extra details, explanations and fillers, and just stop. Get comfortable with silences and with waiting for people to ask you for more details, rather than assuming they'll need all of the information up front.

If you're an undersharer, resist the impulse to hide behind questions or to avoid interrupting. Make it a rule that you can't ask questions, you can only share statements about yourself. Dig an honest truth out of yourself, share it with as much detail as you can, and try

your best to meet the other person's depth. When you feel that panic from someone getting 'too close', just take a breath, remind yourself that you are never committed to anything forever, and just take your time while continuing to share.

Here are some examples of sharing a single truth (imagine each being followed by a patiently curious silence):

> *When I first walked into this dance class, I felt quite out of place, probably because this is the first time I've ever danced.*
>
> *I like the way you flick your hair when you talk.*
>
> *My father was fairly strict with me. When I came home I had to jump straight into chores and get them all done by the time he got home or else he'd flip out. After a few years of this I started getting quite anxious about having things done perfectly, and that's probably why I procrastinate on important tasks all the time — I never feel like they're good enough yet.*

Notice that while they each have a different quantity of content, these examples only share a single point of truth. An oversharer might combine all these points and more into a single expression, and an undersharer might not invest to this depth. Also, notice how they are all *statements*. There is no question mark at the end to pressure the receiver into reciprocating — silence is all that's needed. If you can hold a silence longer than the other person, they will naturally invest, at least a little, allowing more likelihood of a balance to be achieved. Or they'll leave, which is also fine (it gives you space to find a better fit).

By now, you've probably identified what you tend to be: an oversharer or an undersharer. As you work on correcting this, it will naturally lead you into a challenging situation: *you're trying your best but the other person won't change.* Not everyone you speak with will read this book or be conscious of their own tendencies, yet they might be great people you'd love to connect with. So let's now look at how to support others when they fail to do their part at maintaining a balance.

Encouraging Undersharers

If you notice that the person you're speaking with isn't investing, don't immediately assume that they aren't interested. We can't tell at this stage whether they're politely trying to get rid of you, or if they're desperate for a connection but unable to open up and invest due to their fear or conditioned habits. Assume the latter. The trick with undersharers is to indulge playfully in uncomfortable silences. You don't need to ask questions (this can help but is a tad manipulative). You just need to make a space for them to speak, and refuse to fill that space yourself. Share your truth, then go silent and look at them expectantly. Wait, wait, and wait some more for them to take their turn.

Once they've shared their reaction to your one-piece expression — giving you their one piece of truth in return — it's your turn again. A couple of rounds of this and you'll either naturally achieve a balance or you'll realize that right now is not a good time for the two of you to connect. If they respond but the depth of their investment does not match yours (e.g. they just keep asking you questions), you can simply state how you feel about their undersharing, as a way to encourage them. This will only 'work' on people who genuinely want to connect but are held back by insecurity. Think of this as a strategy to encourage undersharers who want to contribute but feel unable to. Here are some examples:

> *I feel like I'm doing all the talking, tell me something about you.*
>
> *Tell you what, let's share some real shit about ourselves to get to know each other. I just went, so now it's your turn.*
>
> *For us to make a real connection on this date, you're gonna' have to stop asking questions and start sharing something about you. Come on, open up! Gimme something to work with here. I promise I won't tell anyone you shared.*

Interrupting Oversharers

You'll know when you're with an oversharer because you can barely get a word in. You'll feel like they don't want to hear from you, or you'll be overcome with the desire to escape to a quiet place. *Resist the urge to run*. This person might be a good fit for you if they would just stop panicking and let you in. Realise that they need your leadership here. They're on autopilot right now, blathering on because an impending sense of anxiety builds in them when they see your frustration or boredom or loss of interest. They're stuck in a loop, and will actually be relieved if you help them break out of it. This doesn't mean that you need to discourage them from sharing, you just need to give them guidance on the quantity and the depth that you can handle before you'll want to step in and share your own stuff.

If the problem is their oversharing, and you want to support them away from this neediness, note that they probably need to first feel safe about their abandonment insecurities. There are two things you can do to help them with this. First, when you do get a chance to speak, share something *vulnerable*. Let them know that you have insecurities and darkness and pain like they do, that you're their equal. This will calm them down about feeling like they have to earn your approval. Secondly, call out the oversharing that you're seeing as honestly and compassionately as possible, and set a clear expectation about balanced investment. Let them know they can relax and give you a turn occasionally; that you're more likely to give them your attention if they just chill out a bit. Here are some examples of this:

> *Look, I can see you're nervous because you keep talking without pause. I know that feeling, I do it too! But you can relax if you want. I'm listening and I'm not going anywhere, and I'd love to share some stuff with you too.*
>
> *I feel like you've told me so much about you, and I'm not giving you anything in return. Let's balance this. Did I tell you about the time I ...?*
>
> *Wait, I'm struggling to keep up here. I can only handle one piece of information at a time. Let's go back to the first*

point you made before we move forward, because that was interesting. From what I heard, I feel that…

I should probably let you know something about me. I can be quite introverted socially, so I need people to be patient with me when it's my turn to respond. So just go silent when you've finished speaking and I'll get there in my own time. If it looks like I'm struggling to speak, I'm probably just processing things in my mind first.

Maintenance

Once you've established a relaxed pattern of shared investment, and there is clear evidence that the relationship is probably going to continue beyond just a few interactions, it's time to talk directly with them about maintaining balance through boundaries. Reciprocation as a powerful honesty principle is not just limited to a single interaction, date or conversation, it must be kept up throughout a relationship. Connections need to be maintained like a car: regularly checked and serviced and fixed when necessary. Sometimes that means reassessing how things have been going lately and seeing if the honesty is still balanced.

The full balancing process is outside the scope of this book (balancing investment in a relationship over time), so I'll leave it until the third book in this trilogy — *Only Human* — which focuses more on respect and acceptance than honesty. But within the context of powerful honesty, make sure that you continue with constant boundary-setting and adjustments in order to keep the investment in any connection as equal as possible, particularly when it comes to honest disclosure. For a good-fit connection to grow into a healthy, long-term relationship or friendship, it's recommended that you both always try to share with the same level of vulnerability. It doesn't need to happen every time, but it needs to balance out on average.

Art, not science.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Reciprocation is about making sure that the depth of honesty is equal in a connection.
- Love Avoidants undershare — they hide behind silence, questions, secrecy or pointless noise in order to avoid being vulnerable.
- Love Addicts overshare — they spill their guts without permission and don't invite people to reciprocate, in order to avoid losing love and attention.
- Many people switch between the two, depending on the type of the person with whom they're interacting.
- Balanced investment means sharing to the same level of intimacy. This is less about *how much* you share and more about *what* you share — particularly in terms of vulnerable honesty. You need to be equally shameless, more than anything else, for a connection to form.
- If someone undershares, call them out and create silent spaces for them to fill, using questions as a last resort.
- If someone overshares, interrupt them and reassure them that they will not lose you, and that you want to share in return.

KEY ACTIONS

- Make a list of the main relationships in your life and note if you undershare, overshare, or are generally balanced.
- If you identify any relationship as being imbalanced, arrange a time to speak to the other person about balancing it out more. Don't script this conversation, just initiate it and talk about how balanced you feel it to be — then allow them to respond, and just go from there.

Social Gardening, part 1: Planting Seeds

"The need for connection and community is primal, as fundamental as the need for air, water and food."

Dean Ornish

Social Skills 101: How to Talk to People and Make Friends

Creating a thriving, good-fit social circle by simply being honest is one of the most fundamental skills we're *not* taught in school. I remember feeling baffled throughout much of my early years regarding how I'm supposed to make friends with new people that I'm interested in. It's one of those things you're just expected to know how to do without any coaching, training or resources. So naturally I assumed I was simply stupid because everyone else seemed to get it and I was the odd one.

Fast-forward a couple of decades, and I have learned that most other people also don't know how to create high-quality social circles, at least not in an honest way. Sure, many people have a group of friends, but when you investigate deeper you'll find that for the most part these social groups were not a conscious creation. Connections are often a case of automatically befriending whomever is placed close to you, like workmates, flatmates, and classmates. Very few people are capable of creating friendships with complete strangers. Or, for those who can create new social circles, you'll often find that they resort to deceptive tactics, like people-pleasing or other manipulative approaches, to make people like them under false pretences.

Most social groups consist of people you were plonked next to in life, like sports team colleagues or friends of friends. It's rare to

encounter a social group that has been consciously created, with the leaders taking care to qualify their friends based on aligned values. It's even rarer to see connections that are initiated and led boldly by someone who expresses themselves in a shamelessly honest way. In short, most social groups are not created with honesty; they are simply born of lucky logistical circumstances. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it often means that the connection is dependent on shared circumstances, and will break apart if those circumstances change. Many of my shallower friendships disintegrated when I moved from New Zealand to Europe, while the deeper connections remained almost unaffected.

Social gardening describes the art of deliberately creating a high-quality, genuinely good-fit social circle; a long-term process requiring courage, leadership, polarization through powerful honesty, and strong qualification of potential connections with priority given to self-respect. Creating a quality social circle means engaging powerfully and honestly in the social world while simultaneously having the patience required to be alone for as long as it takes until you find the right people for you.

Think of your social circle like a garden that you grow with honesty. In the next few chapters, we're going to explore how to plant, tend, maintain, and reap the harvest from your social garden. We're going to explore something no one was able or willing to explicitly teach you before: how to make friends by just being yourself, without needing to resort to people-pleasing, 'How to win friends and influence people' Machiavellian-style manipulation, or pick-up artist seduction bullshit.

Build a Garden

Before you can hope to create a healthy social circle or find loving and confident partners, *you first need to become a person of value and create a life worth sharing*. Not by other people's standards, but by your own. When I was first properly getting into dating and meeting new people, it quickly became apparent that I didn't have many interesting things about my life to share with them.

I struggled to think of things to say because there wasn't much to discuss. Watching how I lived and what I did with my time wouldn't have told you much about who I was; my interests, passions and beliefs were not well expressed through my day-to-day activities. My life bored *me* to talk about. I was so scared of judgment that I never pursued my honest passions, and therefore had no garden that any plant would want to grow in.

Before you plant seeds, you need to build the garden: the life you will invite others to share with you. It must be a garden *you* enjoy growing. Initiating conversations with total strangers is great skill-building if you have no garden yet, but ultimately you'll prefer to meet new people in environments that you enjoy being in, which means filling your calendar with activities that inspire you to enjoy life. Because this life will be authentic to you, it will be far easier and more natural to initiate new connections within it. As you build your garden, you'll naturally create easy social opportunities.

Specifically, I'm talking about getting involved with hobbies, learning courses, travel, projects, sports, and other activities that you engage in solely to improve your quality of life and live by your values. We're talking about activities that represent who you truly are. If you don't know what you should be doing, create a random list of things to try. I got all inspired after reading the book *Yes Man* by Danny Wallace, so I started saying Yes to all suggestions and offers. This led me to randomly try salsa dancing, which eventually transitioned into a now long-term obsession with Brazilian Zouk dancing, through which I've met my wife, a third of my coaching clients, and a number of new close friends. You'd be amazed at how far a bit of courage to try new things can take your social life.

Once you've created a weekly routine of enjoyable activities that you're doing in order to live by your values and explore your true desires, you can start introducing yourself to the people you naturally come into contact with through these activities, and invite them to interact with you. If your preferred activities tend toward social isolation, like reading or playing video games, try to find a social version of them, like a book club or a gaming convention. These are what we call 'warm' locations to meet people — places it's easy to begin a conversation while being yourself, since everyone

there has similar interests, and therefore you're unlikely to be negatively judged or encounter 'stranger-danger' resistance.

Imagine this: you've always had an interest in archery, but never given it a go. So you jump online, and find out your local range does a two-hour introductory workshop. While attending this workshop, you pair up with another beginner, and you genuinely compliment him on his natural accuracy. He reciprocates, and the two of you naturally fall into an unforced conversation about why you're each at the workshop. You end up agreeing to meet up for a practice that Sunday to further develop your new skills. And *abrakadabra* - you just started a friendship! That's how easy it can be.

Planting Seeds

For most of your life, you've had your social seeds planted for you. In school, the office, your friends' friends, family connections, sports teams, and so on; your connections have grown from other people's actions and leadership. From now on, you're going to take matters into your own hands. Yes, that is frightening, I know, but it's the only way you can create a quality social circle through honest expression while simultaneously reducing the fears you have around loneliness. Once you learn how to create friends without needing to perform or be fake in any way, *you'll never worry about loneliness again*. This skill will destroy your sense of scarcity - you'll finally see the social world for what it is: an enormous abundance of potential friends and lovers. If you know that you can plant seeds, then you don't need to panic when some plants die out. This will reduce your neediness, making you more attractive, so it just keeps getting easier and easier over time.

The good news: to begin developing your social gardening skills, you need only to plant seeds. This is a low-risk and relatively simple task, as opposed to overwhelming and impossibly terrifying concepts like 'making new friends' or 'dating' or 'starting a relationship'. Going up to a stranger with the intention of convincing them to become your friend or lover will fill you with anxiety and pressure, and rightly so. It would be incredibly needy and self-serving to have that

intention, and would likely encourage you to engage in dishonesty. For planting seeds, we're going to try something different: initiating connection without trying to make it grow into something more.

There are two different types of people to meet and plant seeds with: *strangers* and *associates*. Strangers are people you've never met and with whom you have no 'reasonable' excuse to interact, like someone walking down the street or sitting next to you on the bus. An associate is someone you've also never meaningfully engaged with before, but you are in a situation where it makes more 'sense' to initiate an interaction, like sitting next to someone new in your art class, or chatting with that guy who always serves you coffee.

Inviting, Not Requesting

Inviting people to interact with you means going up to a stranger or associate and initiating a conversation with them — giving them the opportunity to talk to you, through being honest with them. This could be a stranger in a public place, like a mall, café, or nightclub, or even someone walking down the street. Or it could be an associate: someone in a situation where conversation seems to be more 'socially acceptable', like your friend's cousin or the new dance student at your local studio.

My clients and I have only created a few long-term connections by initiating an interaction with complete strangers, because the likelihood of you finding a genuine good-fit person for you in a random selection process like this is minimal, as it should be if you are being genuine. Only a few people in a hundred are going to be a good fit for you, and that's who we're looking for. Fuck *quantity*, we want you to be able to find *best* friends, *loyal* business partners, and *intimate* relationships, and to create an overall deeply loving social circle. So, we're going to focus on planting seeds with associates because they're more likely than strangers to be a good fit.

Inviting strangers to converse does, however, serve a useful purpose: it is much more challenging than speaking with associates, so you'll

develop social courage that will serve you well overall and ensure that you don't hesitate when it's time to act. If you can initiate an interaction with a stranger who's rushing to catch their bus, without feeling shame, you'll have zero barriers at parties, classes and other 'warm' social events full of associates. So, if you're shy and timid, meeting strangers can be great training for ensuring that, when you encounter associates, you're much less hesitant.

The Pick Up industry, women's magazines, 'networking' books, and other similar resources will try to convince you that meeting new people is complicated, difficult and risky, and that it requires all kinds of strategic trickery. This is simply untrue. Meeting new people is as simple as walking up to someone, opening your mouth, and allowing honesty to be delivered. Once that's done, the 3X Model approach to creating connections will help you develop strong and genuine social skills over time.

The 3X Model for Initiating Conversations

The format that works best for me and my clients, when it comes to meeting strangers, is the 3X Model, which encourages you to curiously notice a given person, honestly express yourself to them, and then respectfully wait for a response. In other words:

Curiosity: Observe what you notice about them (what drew your attention to them in the first place? Why do you want to meet them?), e.g. they have great dance moves.

Honesty: Go up to them, say "Hi", honestly tell them about what you noticed, and share how you feel about what you noticed, e.g. "Hey dude, I saw you from across the hall, you move like magic, I was really impressed!"

Respect: Wait patiently for them to either respond or leave.

Believe it or not, this 3X Model also describes the process of a continued conversation (it's basically just talking and listening,

infused with honesty). They're the only steps you'll ever need to follow in order to create deep and meaningful connections with people. It might seem too simple to be true, but that's only because you've been conditioned to hide honesty during social interactions, which complicates matters dramatically. When you simply notice whatever catches your attention, give yourself permission to honestly speak your mind, and then wait for a response, you can create anything from a five-minute conversation to a fifty-year marriage. The 3X Model allows you not only to start conversations, but to also continue them indefinitely.

Here are some examples of what this might look like in terms of planting seeds and initiating conversations, though please do not use these exact examples like pick-up lines. What you say should be genuine and spontaneous.

> *"Hello, this might sound a little random, but I'm new to this dance class and I was looking around the room to see who I should meet first, and then I saw you. The way you dance impressed me."*
>
> *"Excuse me, I can see you're in a rush, so I won't keep you. I just wanted to say that I noticed you because of your confident posture. I just wanted to let you know that you stood out in the crowd."*
>
> *"Hi, I saw you from across the bar and your long gorgeous hair caught my attention. I felt a wave of attraction when I saw it. I had to meet you."*

Notice, share, wait. It really is that simple.

You'll probably already be worried about what to say next, but until they've responded there is *nothing* to say next. We must allow them to give us something new to work with before we can respond and continue — it's the principle of reciprocation. A confident person doesn't do all the work, they just get things started. So, take the pressure off yourself to get a date, make a new friend, or even have a conversation. You need to say one thing only. You're doing this for yourself. Plant a seed, and then release all obligation and pressure. Once you've noticed something and genuinely expressed how you feel about it, your job is *done* — it's their turn now.

Showing Your Intentions

There's one other authentic way in which you can initiate conversations with new people. If there is nothing specific that you genuinely notice about someone, and that's not the reason you've chosen to begin talking with them, then you shouldn't pretend. You can approach them and tell them honestly *why* you're talking to them as a way to start the conversation. Being as honest as possible here can lead to amazing conversations and connections, even when there's nothing particular about this person that you noticed at first.

Jason, a BROJO veteran, was one of the first to attend a workshop we led on meeting strangers in public, and he pioneered what you might call *The Honest Intentions Approach*. He was socially shy and anxious, so it would have been dishonest for him to pretend that the reason he was speaking with people was because he noticed something special about them. Truthfully, going up to strangers was so nerve-wracking for him that he could barely notice anything at all besides his pounding heart, sweaty palms, and the endless rejection fantasies playing in his head.

Instead, Jason ended up going around saying the only thing he could honestly say, which was; "I'm coming to say hi because I'm practicing meeting strangers to overcome my social anxiety." The reactions were mind-blowing. Few attendees at this workshop received the kind of positive responses that Jason did. One woman stopped and spoke with him for almost forty-five minutes; a deep, meaningful conversation about anxiety and overcoming fears. It was probably the most genuine conversation and connection that he'd ever had with a stranger *in his entire life.*

You can do this, too. Whatever the true motive is behind you coming to plant your seeds, reveal it as soon as possible. Most perceptions of 'creepiness' come from the feeling that there's a hidden agenda, so simply ensure that nothing is hidden. Sure, people may still think you're weird, unattractive or awkward but at least they'll be able to feel safe in your presence, knowing what you're about. I know people have told you that you need to be 'mysterious', but fuck that! It would take someone ten lifetimes

to learn everything about you, so you never need to worry about revealing 'too much', providing you always respect their space for a response. At the time of writing this, I've been with my wife for almost six years, and I've been ruthlessly open and honest the entire time, as has she, and yet we discover new things about each other every week.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Build a *garden* first. Make creating an interesting life your primary focus, and bringing people into that life a secondary priority.
- *Planting seeds* simply means starting a conversation and leaving space for someone to either reciprocate or leave. Once you've started, your main job is done. The rest is optional.
- Use the 3X Model to start a conversation: notice something, introduce yourself and share what you've noticed (i.e. why you're talking to them), and then go silent to allow them time to digest and respond (if they want).
- If someone seems concerned or creeped out, simply reveal the truth about why you're talking with them — as honestly as possible. At least they won't have to worry that you're hiding something dangerous.

KEY ACTIONS

- Initiate three conversations with either strangers or associates before reading the next chapter. It does not matter if they respond, just plant a seed.
- Add one new interesting activity to your week that can put you into a new social environment (but make sure that the primary reason for this is that it's something you're interested in doing just for your own growth).

Social Gardening, part 2: Growing Plants

"Truth is; everybody is going to hurt you. You just gotta find the ones worth suffering for."

Bob Marley

Inviting A Connection to Grow

In the beginning, you'll need to plant many seeds. After time and practice, or possibly even right away, you'll notice that some people are responding more positively to you than others. They'll engage in the conversation, be 'warm to your form', and it will naturally feel like continued connection is on the cards. This is where the 'fertilising' stage begins — growing the seed into a thriving plant by adding value through honesty and respect. It's also where a practice of deep respect for yourself can be developed by carefully choosing who is worth your time and energy.

So, how do you go from, "Hey, I noticed you and wanted to meet you," to becoming best friends, business partners, or lovers? Again, we'll keep it simple. The process that you used to initiate the connection (remember the 3X Model?) is the same process that you can follow to continue the interaction. If you've already initiated the conversation by sharing something honest, you're now in the Respect Phase. So, you wait for their response, and then you notice something about it and share what you've noticed. In value terms: Respect (listen and pay attention), then Curiosity (mentally and emotionally explore how you've been affected by their response), and then Honesty (accurately express what you noticed while exploring). In other words, pay close attention to their response — what to say next should occur to you immediately because you'll notice something that you can speak about. Listen and respond honestly.

Simple, But Not Easy

Your fear is probably going to get in the way at first. The same courage-barriers you faced when initiating the conversation will regularly reappear throughout the interaction and throughout an ongoing relationship. We are afraid of both giving and receiving honesty, and following the 3X Model will continuously provoke your fear of rejection and humiliation. You'll feel compelled to engage in mind-reading, and you'll pressure yourself to maintain a 'good' appearance. Your ego-identity (e.g. the Cool Guy) will keep trying to promote dishonesty whenever the truth seems to threaten how much the other person will like you. These distractions will interfere with your ability to do what you've probably always been able to do with best friends or trusted family members: just listen attentively and respond honestly.

To keep this as achievable as possible, I recommend that you prioritise your focus toward one simple goal: just invite the person to continue interacting, by sharing what you noticed.

In the first book of this trilogy — *Nothing to Lose* — we spoke in depth about how to explore your mind to find the truth you want to share. I won't repeat all that here, but I will try to make it as straight-forward as possible for you. When someone responds to your initial invitation to speak, you will have an internal reaction to their response. You will think and feel things, based on what you noticed about them. You'll perhaps enjoy their response, or feel confused or afraid, or wish they had given you more to work with, or even miss what they said because you were distracted. The more nervous you are when initiating an interaction, the more intense your reaction is likely to be when they respond. This is completely normal and you don't need to fight against it. Indeed, this is your very source of conversation material!

Let Them See How They've Affected You

When I first started experimenting with initiating conversations, I found that if I was open about my anxiety and fear, I often ended

up having meaningful and fun connections with people. I remember one girl who didn't believe me when I told her that I was nervous, so I took her hand and placed it on my chest, where she could clearly feel my pounding heart. It blew her mind. We spent a good ten minutes talking about how 'brave' I was, and why I was doing this. Ironically, when I started to become more socially confident, people became more suspicious of me because I *wasn't* nervous! Real emotion is relatable, so it makes no sense to hide it if you want genuine connections.

The uncomfortable sensations you experience when initiating contact with new people are probably your best source of potential conversation material, because they will be so incredibly *real* to others. When you're honest rather than pretending to be cool, you become unique, memorable, and easy to connect with. But until you see this happen for yourself, you probably won't believe that being honest about 'unattractive' emotions like anxiety and confusion could help you connect with others. It's unlikely that up 'til now you've been regularly interacting with people with truth and shamelessness. That's OK, few people do, but because we rarely see people demonstrating this we generally don't believe that it can or should be done. But it can. And it should.

Being transparent right at the beginning of a conversation will feel extremely unfamiliar and 'wrong'. I want to challenge your beliefs and open your mind to the idea that the reason you don't see others being boldly and vulnerably honest during interactions with unfamiliar people is because they aren't seeing others do it either, and they're scared to go first. You'll often need to be the one who leads. The world needs you to step up and be the social hero you've wished someone else would be. You will feel a bit like you're stepping off a cliff and hoping the ground will rise up to meet your foot. I'm essentially asking you to take a leap of faith off that cliff, and see what *really* happens.

Initiate the conversation, listen to what they say and observe their response, and then notice your own reaction to what you've observed. Maybe what they said reminded you of an experience you had last week — "You know, I met a girl last week who gave me that exact same look. We ended up becoming friends." Maybe you are confused by their response — "Hmm, you'll have to help

me out here because I have no idea what you mean by that." Maybe you feel like they're creeped out by you — "OK, maybe I should back up a bit here, it looks like you're uncomfortable with me doing this." Whatever you notice, share it with them as your next response.

This is the 3X Model in action, and it *never* runs out of material. No matter how they react to you, there will be something about it that you will notice, and can therefore express (providing they don't run away). I once stopped a girl coming out of a mobile phone store. She obviously wasn't prepared to have some random dude come at her out of nowhere and say "Hi," and she totally freaked out. I noticed this response, discarded whatever I had originally planned to say, and instead said, "Oh wow, I just gave you a fright, didn't I? My bad, I wasn't trying to scare you, I just wanted to meet you." She scuttled away almost immediately. But it doesn't matter. Even her getting a fright and not saying anything was something I could notice and then share with her. As long as you're not trying to make them like you, or even trying to make them feel 'good', you are free to notice and speak about anything.

I invite you to now fully let go of all your people-pleasing tendencies, and just start being detached from any particular outcome.

Listen and observe carefully, then express the reaction that you noticed occur inside you while they spoke (or shortly after they finished). That's it. This is how best friends talk to each other, and there's no reason why a connection cannot *begin* this way. Instead of missing their response because you're desperately trying to think of something to say next, just allow them to provoke spontaneous and genuine thoughts, feelings, memories and realizations in you. Then, once you've shared your reaction, go silent once more and give them another turn. Remember, it's like a game of tennis: you hit the ball to them, wait for them to return it however they please, and then hit it again. One person at a time, reacting spontaneously to each other's shots without worrying about how you're going to hit the ball in the future.

To begin with, I recommend that you continue practicing the 3X Model in conversations until *they* end the interaction. You'd be amazed at how often you'll end a conversation prematurely simply

because you're feeling nervous, when in reality they were keen to keep going. Get used to just sharing what you notice, in terms of your reaction to them (and the outside world), without trying to make the conversation go somewhere. This is what spontaneous conversation with your best friend looks like. Both my clients and the BROJO community have experimented with this enough to confirm that you can absolutely apply this to any associate or stranger.

Fertilising and Qualifying

Rod, a friend of mine and a coach from Brazil, recently raised a dilemma he was having in growing his coaching business. Doing as I had trained him, he was reaching out to people and trying to add value to their lives as a way of living with integrity and growing his database of potential clients. But, as he put it in a message to me, he was struggling with letting go of outcomes. While some people responded positively and reciprocated equally, others made Rod feel like he was doing all the work or that they were just sucking value out of him. He questioned his own generosity and integrity when he felt unmotivated to contact people who didn't give back. He worried that a truly giving person would not reject someone just because they didn't give back as much value as he gave them.

Rod's dilemma with developing client relationships represents a key barrier to forming a deeply connected and satisfying social circle, too. Choosing which plants to fertilise will require a form of self-serving ruthlessness. If you try to give yourself to everyone equally, the most likely outcome is that manipulators and those with toxic neediness will steal your time and energy, depleting your ability to connect with good-fit people. Simply put: you can't and shouldn't give equally to everyone — you should skew your giving towards those who reciprocate (but you still make the first move).

Using honesty to grow connections with people will help you sort out the healthy plants from the weeds. The reason it's beneficial to be honest from the very beginning of an interaction is because you want to polarize people and expose their true nature as quickly

as possible. Ruthless honesty will guide you: it will guide you on whom to focus and spend time interacting with. Make no mistake, you must be strict with how you spend your social energy. Every minute spent with a bad-fit is a minute stolen away from a good-fit (although it can still be a valuable learning experience).

After you've initiated a conversation, the other person's first reaction already gives you clues as to whether you should continue with them. If their response is playful, loving, empathetic, curious, kind, interesting, honest, or in some way is something you resonate with personally, then you are receiving signs that it's probably worth continuing. If, however, they respond with rudeness, hostility, suspicion, scorn, false flattery, braggadocio, or seem to have an obviously fake persona, you should already begin preparing yourself to let them go.

That said, some people don't warm up immediately because they've been hurt before and are protecting themselves, while others might seem warm to begin with but it's only because they're fake and manipulative. Some people are shy and may appear disinterested even when they like you, while others are excellent at pretending to be interested. People are complex. There are no hard and fast rules, so just pay attention to patterns over time. Observing their responses carefully rather than trying to think of something good to say next will help you quickly notice the more obvious signs. Keep asking yourself if they're showing potential to be a good connection, or if it's a better use of your energy to start fresh with someone else. Seems obvious, I know, but I'm constantly surprised at how many people fail to consciously and deeply assess (and reassess) their connections with people.

I keep it simple: if I like the way I feel in someone's presence after a couple of minutes of interacting with them, I continue. If I don't, I start winding it down, preparing to eventually exit. Yes, sometimes I'll mistakenly feel pleasure in someone's presence because they are manipulating me with flattery, so I manage this by regularly checking to see if I believe they're being genuine with me, e.g. if they seem happy all the time and unfazed by anything, then they're probably faking it. But if I feel pleasure in someone's presence, if I enjoy interacting with them even when they're upset, depressed, angry or tired, then I'm probably experiencing a good-fit connection.

My response to Rod's dilemma was simple: focus on the people who are responsive, respectful, and eager to match your investment in them with their own time, energy, openness, kindness etc. Allow the others to naturally fall away, and don't allow disrespectful, manipulative, or unresponsive people to use up all of your mental bandwidth. No one is worth chasing. If they don't give back, move on as if they will never give back.

If you initiate interactions honestly with one hundred new people, probably about eighty of them will feel like an average, unexciting connection. Some will even rapidly escalate toward friction and outright rejection. Move on from these as quickly as possible in order to find the remaining twenty. Rather than being the people-pleaser and trying to befriend everyone, start with the assumption that *most* people aren't an awesome fit for you, so you must be constantly moving on to search for those rarer, high-quality connections. We'll explore more of this later, when we discuss 'weeding' and letting sick plants die.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Keeping a conversation going (authentically) is as simple as paying attention to their response, noticing how it affects you, and then sharing that reaction with them.
- Stay in conversations — following the 3X Model — until the other person leaves, in order to learn how much further you can go (compared to what your fear claims is the end).
- If you feel good in someone's presence while being open and honest with them, then keep talking to them. If not, start watching yourself carefully. If you're being honest but you still don't connect well with them, then exit.
- Don't give everyone equal attention. Imagine you're searching for rare creatures that are an incredibly good match for you. Move on quickly from people who aren't, even if it means being alone.

KEY ACTIONS

- Initiate three conversations with associates or strangers, and keep the conversation going until they end it, simply by following the 3X Model. Don't read the next chapter until you've done this.

Social Gardening, part 3: Harvesting

"It's not just the number of friends you have, and it's not whether or not you're in a committed relationship. It's the quality of your close relationships that matters."

Robert J. Waldinger

Enjoying the Fruits Of Your Garden

Before too long, with the help of the 3X approach to conversations, you'll start experiencing genuine connections: interactions that go deeper and become more meaningful. At this point, it's time to invite people to consistently spend more time in your life, to begin a 'friendship' or a 'relationship'. It's time to harvest the fruit that has grown from the seeds you planted. You will now continue using curiosity, honesty and respect to build relationships, friendships and partnerships of all kinds.

Yet again, it's simple but not easy. There are mental and emotional barriers to overcome. At certain points during any interaction the likelihood of 'rejection' will spike dramatically. This mostly occurs at three milestones in particular: initiating the conversation (which we've discussed in the previous chapter); vulnerably expressing attraction or interest; and inviting someone to spend more time with you in the future (showing you want them in your life). Beginning a longer-term connection involves both expressing interest in and inviting people into your life.

Beware: at this point many people sabotage themselves due to their subconscious fears around commitment, abandonment and intimacy. You may notice yourself suddenly losing interest in someone after a connection forms, or you start making yourself

too busy to find time for people. Be bold and avoid falling into this trap of indirect avoidance tactics. Yes, I know it's scary to let people in, but it's even scarier to spend your whole life not feeling connected to anyone, so pick up your balls or your ovaries and push through the fear.

Expressing Interest and Attraction

Whether it's through words, facial expressions, body language or touch, the idea of directly expressing attraction and interest causes many of us to feel a huge amount of shame and pressure, especially if the attraction is sexual in nature or the interest shows that we are emotionally invested in the other person. The only way to overcome this misplaced shame is to start expressing attraction and interest more regularly, so that you expose your shame piece by piece until it's all gone.

Let's start with *sexual attraction*. If you're like most people, you've been led to believe that there's something painful and shameful about directly expressing sexual interest. Many people feel ashamed to even be aroused, let alone having the source of their interest know about it. It's also likely that your previous attempts to express sexual interest were done in off-putting, needy ways to get a certain result (e.g. get their phone number), and so you have been met with rejection on the few times you tried to be brave. As a result of this reaction to your weak honesty, you now hesitate to show sexual interest in people, imagining that it will lead to embarrassment, awkwardness, rejection, or even accusations of sexual harassment. In your mind, perhaps it's considered dangerous to express attraction, or at least to do so without skill and charm, so you reluctantly resort to playing it safe and being dishonestly indirect about your desire for people. In my experience, my female clients most worry about coming across as needy and desperate, while my male clients most worry about coming across as creepy or abusive.

We store up painful memories of our experiences attempting to express interest, because in the rare times that we tried to do it, we didn't truly *give*; we tried to get (e.g. asking someone on a date

to get a relationship or sex). This will inevitably lead to rejection in many cases. But it's important to understand that these rejections are *not* due to the expression of attraction; they only show what happens when you're trying to take from others. You weren't rejected for being attracted to them, you were rejected for trying to get something from them, like approval, a phone number, a date, sex, or a relationship. You wanted more than they were willing to give, so they said "no". This doesn't mean it was wrong to be attracted to them in the first place! You simply confused trying to get something with expressing attraction — and yet, they are two completely different expressions.

Attraction can be expressed without trying to get anything, without being creepy, and without a need for reciprocation in any way. Expressing sexual attraction is as simple as sharing how you feel, without any requests or pressure to obtain an outcome. *Giving attraction freely* is about letting the other person know that they have an emotional effect on you. You don't do this by asking them out or trying to get them to do something sexual with you. Instead, just express and share the way they make you feel. Maybe it's that you daydreamed about them during your boring work meeting. Maybe it's the rush of excitement you felt when you saw that they replied to your text message. Maybe it's the way you get lost for words when they make eye contact. Tell them about that stuff, without adding, "So, wanna go out sometime?" Just express your truth to them for free — no added requests!

Not all attraction is sexual. To build a connection, you must honestly express all forms of interest — sexual/physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. This *gives* the other person safety by knowing how you truly feel. This is as simple as telling them how you feel about them; what you noticed about them, and your reaction to that. It's just the 3X Model again. Feel free to tell people that you like them, want to talk to them, think their hair smells incredible, enjoy their company, are fascinated by their philosophy, or think that they're fun to go travelling with. Do this as soon as it occurs to you; don't hold back that gift of recognition. Ensure that everyone knows how you feel about them, so they don't have to guess. Make sharing your feelings a normal part of conversation with others. It doesn't have to be a big deal.

Beginning a Friendship or a Relationship

This same honesty process applies to that other 'high risk' situation that occurs in the early stages of getting to know someone: inviting someone into your life, that is, beginning a 'relationship' or 'friendship' or 'partnership' — some sort of committed agreement to spend time together regularly and abide by a set of boundaries to respect, support and love each other (or at least work together well).

Some people become addicted to just initiating conversations or expressing interest once they have 'mastered' these elements. It can be safe to stay in the start-zone and never move on, because intimacy and commitment scares the crap out of many people. This fear becomes a hindrance to forming long-term relationships or deeper connections, and therefore a restriction on honesty. While you *can* have a deep connection with anyone during a single interaction without ever seeing them again, time plays an important role in allowing the deepest level of connection to be reached, and that requires some form of ongoing relationship. No matter how deep and meaningful your conversations are, spending time together and repeatedly conversing will take things to an even deeper, more intimate level. And guess who must lead this process?

Correct! It's you!

Whether you meet someone walking down the street, in your favourite café, or at the new dance class that you just joined, a relationship can only form if you see them again in a different context. If you only see them at the dance class, you'll just be a fellow dance-enthusiast to them, but if you're able to break out of this safety-zone and bring them into other aspects of your life, then they can form a relationship with you as a whole person. And, to keep it simple, the only guaranteed way to allow this opportunity to occur is to invite them to spend more time with you. But this does not necessarily mean you have to *ask* them to.

The 3X Model still applies here. You just notice how you feel about seeing them again and then share this with them. This way, there's no getting needy about asking them on a date or

pressuring them to become your friend, no trying to *get* them. You just honestly express how you feel about the idea of spending more time together, and then wait for their response. The logistics about seeing each other again will be resolved easily *after* it's first established that you're both enthusiastic about doing it (e.g. once they say that they're keen to see you again too, *then* you ask for their phone number). As mentioned before, prepare to have your dreams shattered by the possibility that they don't feel the same about you. It's OK! Your honest expression about your desire to spend more time with them will simply polarize bad-fits away and allow space for a better-fit connection to come into your life.

In practical terms, when a conversation naturally comes to a conclusion or is interrupted by life (e.g. someone needs to catch a bus), this is usually the point to continue with the 3X Model and express how you feel about the potential for another encounter. You don't have to wait until the end of the conversation, of course. How you feel about seeing them again may occur to you sooner and should be expressed then, like if you're both interested in an upcoming event that you're discussing. This is not complicated; don't make it bigger than what it is. Here are some examples:

> *"I thoroughly enjoyed meeting you, I'd love to see you again."*
>
> *"This was the most interesting conversation I've had today, I'm keen to catch up again later this week if you're up for it."*
>
> *"I'm stoked we're both into horror movies, I'd love to see Lights Out with you."*

Yes, it really is that simple.

The Full Picture

To summarize: expressing attraction or inviting someone to build a relationship with you is as simple as sharing how you feel and then giving them space to respond. State your truth concisely — avoid the anxious temptation to drag it out, over-explain, seduce, be indirect, justify, sell, or sugar-coat — and then just let them have

their reaction. If they're receptive, then you can move forward with setting up the next meeting or you can initiate physical escalation. If they're not, oh well: at least you gave them the opportunity. Now go meet someone else.

Voila! See how the 3X Model plays out in every part of an interaction? You now have the complete blueprint for creating a wonderful social life. Of course, without action this entire Social Gardening concept is worthless. Reading this book won't build your social circle. You need to put the book down, find someone to initiate a conversation with, say "Hi", and 3X Model your way through the interaction and possibly onwards into a long-term connection. Make a list of people you could do this with in the next week, e.g. friends of friends, people in your class, workmates you haven't met yet.

We must also acknowledge a hidden challenge in creating a meaningfully connected social circle, which we'll cover in the next, and final, social gardening chapter.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Expressing attraction and interest is as simple as noticing what you like about someone and sharing it with them. You do not need to request anything from them to do this.
- Invite someone into your life by expressing how you feel about the thought of spending more time with them. If they seem to be interested as well, then you can set up a specific meet-up.

KEY ACTIONS

- Invite one person to spend more time with you by expressing attraction or interest.

Social Gardening, part 4: Weeding

"People put so much effort into starting a relationship and so little effort into ending one."

Marina Abramovic

Letting the Sick Plants Die

A subtly difficult part of the social gardening process is ending connections, which is actually part of the preparation: creating space for new high-quality people. You have a limited number of social hours available to you each week, so every minute you spend with a bad-fit connection is a minute you're missing out on a potentially wonderful friend or lover. To rescue these precious minutes, you must use honesty to rid yourself of any dead weight. For many of you, it's time to start weeding your garden.

It's time to start getting comfortable with *rejecting* people.

Let's get practical here. Write down a list of every person you spend time with on, at least, a monthly basis. Once you've made your list, indicate how much time you spend with each person, perhaps estimating how many hours per month you interact with them. *Do not keep reading until you've done this list.* If you aren't ready to write this list yet, come back to this chapter later.

So, you've now got your list. Before we do the next part, take a breath and be prepared to face some painful truths about your social circle. You may be about to discover that many or even *all* of your supposed friends and family are not a good fit for you! If you're like me when I first did this exercise, you'll feel massive resistance toward acknowledging this possibility. The fears of confrontation, hurting someone's feelings and being alone will pump ice-water

through your veins. This is OK. You will not be obliged to take any action if you don't want to. No one is going to *force* you to reject anyone. We're just going to ensure that there's some honest self-awareness before you complain next time that your social life isn't satisfactory.

Ready? OK. Now I want you to go through your list and put each person through a simple assessment based on how you feel emotionally: 1) when you spend time with the person, 2) just after you've spent time with them, and 3) when you think about spending time with them. Give each of them a rating as to how their presence affects you. I prefer to use simple measurements of 'uplifted/connected' (healthy), 'forgettable/unaffected' (neutral), and 'stressed/drained' (unhealthy). Or another way to look at it: over time, do they make you a better person?

Beware! You'll feel good about some people simply because they validate you. To counter this, imagine what it would be like to continue your connection with this person if they were to never compliment you, or need your support, or look up to you, or any other form of validation. A good-fit connection will improve your quality of life simply by existing; they don't need to please you in order for you to enjoy their company.

I thoroughly enjoy spending time with my friend Anthony, yet he rarely compliments me and he never tries to make me happy. He's got a great sense of humour but he's generally pessimistic and even nihilistic, and we spend a lot of time disagreeing. The key is that he's bluntly honest and straightforward, which I find easy to connect with. It relaxes me not to have to guess what he's thinking, and his ruthlessly opinionated stance on life amuses me and provides welcome relief from all the people-pleasing I'm subjected to throughout the week. Some of my wife's friends are always giving me compliments and acting happy around me, yet they feel fake and forced, and it makes me uncomfortable. I prefer Anthony's company.

There is no definitive measure that will tell you whom you should spend time with and whom you should cut out; it's a totally subjective assessment. What I am suggesting is for you to *start at the bottom* of the list and work upwards. What I mean by this is:

whomever you spend a lot of time with but who also provides *the least emotionally satisfactory connection* is the first to get cut. Keep removing these people from your list, and use the newly created time to forge new, more fulfilling connections, or to spend more time with current emotionally-beneficial connections. In fact, it's better to be by yourself than to be with a bad-fit.

And how do we cut these people, I hear you ask?

Weeding

Weeding doesn't necessarily require you to phone up these less-than-awesome-fit people and say, "You suck, I'm cutting you off." You can just let them drift away by putting no effort into your relationship with them. When I first did this exercise for myself, I simply stopped contacting the people on the bottom of the list. Most of them returned the favour and didn't reach out to me either. Problem solved!

Unfortunately, there are those who will fight to stay in your life, even when you're not right for each other.

Now, this is where it gets dark and painful. Odds are, you currently have a number of neutral and bad-fit people in your life that you're spending time with. If not, consider yourself at an advantage, because it's easier to start with a blank slate than to have to go through what I'm about to suggest. The painful truth is that you're already allowing unsatisfying connections to steal your time. These people may be family members or what you consider to be 'close' friends. It may even include your partner. Most socially busy people I've met have a social calendar that's filled with what I call 'noise': bad-fit connections that offer no real value — people who encourage dishonesty and discourage integrity.

They gotta' go! You're strongly affected by anyone you spend time with, so your self-worth depends on how ruthlessly you weed the bad-fit people out of your garden. If you're lucky, you might not need to directly reject or exclude people. You simply put your

energy elsewhere, making yourself unavailable to bad-fits. For example, I might invite three people per week to have lunch with me. With my tight schedule, this means people I don't genuinely feel motivated to spend time with simply won't receive any invitations from me. They will have their requests and invitations declined, and they will eventually drop away. When they try to enter my life, I'm genuinely unavailable to see them because my social time has already been reserved for others. I can honestly say, "I'm too busy."

But of course, you may have to actively remove some people the *hard* way. If you're in an abusive relationship/friendship, or have persistent people in your life who suck your energy and drain your resources, honest engagement means confronting these people and demanding that they either change or leave (we're going to cover how to confront people in the next few chapters). In the worst cases, you may need to consider legal action, restraining orders, and completely changing your contact information. People requiring this level of rejection might seem overwhelming but it's worth the effort to remove their toxic influence from your life.

Having narcissistic people target and cling to you is an unfortunate fact of life for people-pleasers and others with low-confidence, so if that applies to you, then extreme measures may be required. In my early years, when I was most needy, I attracted some dark people into my life. Some were users, others were psychologically unhealthy, and many were simply needy like me. Being around them drained me, and in some cases was devastatingly harmful for my self-worth. I had 'friends' who would bully me and insult me where it hurt the most, women who would string me along like a chump, and work colleagues who whined and complained so frequently that I would feel exhausted and depressed by the time my lunch-break rolled around.

Weeding your garden takes many forms, but the core of it is taking an action that ends an unhealthy relationship. You can't stop someone from trying to enter your life, but you can make it very difficult for them. Block their number and social media connection to you. Ask friends to support you in remaining disconnected from the person. Refuse to engage with them in any way (silence is your friend here). Don't give them any fuel for the fire. In some cases, you may even need to involve police or social services.

These actions will usually only be required if you've already attempted a healthy confrontation with the person and they continue to disrespect your wishes. While I have had a few people change their behaviour and become a lot easier to connect with after a solid and healthy confrontation, unfortunately most bad-fits in my life were incapable of the changes I needed for a healthy relationship. *Beware of people who promise to change*. Set them tests that can only be passed with a genuine change in behaviour (e.g. ask them to behave more thoughtfully for an entire month and then measure to see if it happens). Narcissists and users can 'play nice' for a while, but they can't keep it up for long. Later in this book, we will cover something called an 'acceptance invitation'; a test we can use to see if someone can respect you for a lengthy period of time.

The Fear of Hurting People

Many people believe that they're afraid of rejection, but when I dig into this with my clients, I find they're even more afraid of *rejecting*. We don't want to be the ones who hurt other people because we have sympathy for that painful feeling, so to avoid this discomfort we end up convincing ourselves that we don't actually want to reject people. You will have to face your fear of being the one who causes another person pain. Always remember: if they're a bad fit for you, it's in *their* best interests for you to take charge and end the connection. You're doing them no favours by dragging out an unhealthy relationship.

Decent people like yourself are trapped in toxic bad-fit connections simply because they're afraid of hurting someone's feelings. It amazes me to see someone endure a horrible relationship or friendship for *years* just because they are worried that the other person will be hurt if they're asked to leave. If you're a people-pleaser, this probably applies to you. Failing to end things you no longer enjoy is a form of dishonesty, and therefore detrimental to your confidence (and theirs!).

Having a fear of ending relationships and friendships is often what causes people to sabotage their opportunities for creating

connections in the first place. The 'fear of commitment' is really a lack of courage and ability to *end* a relationship. If you have no fear of dumping someone or cutting off a friend, you'll have no fear of taking the risk of getting intimate with someone in the first place. We're not really afraid of people hurting us when they get in close; we're afraid we'll keep letting them do it because we won't have the *cojones* to put a stop to it. We're also afraid of looking stupid by choosing the wrong person, and so we're willing to endure a lifetime of lonesome anguish rather than just sheepishly raising a hand and admitting, "Yeah OK, he was crazy, just like you said he was, I can't believe I ever stuck around with him. My mistake!"

To create a great social garden, you need to weed the sick plants out, which means deliberately rejecting people, hurting their feelings, and making them dislike you. You won't know who needs weeding until after you've already connected with them, so don't let fear of ending things stop you from starting.

We are now going to focus on overcoming your fears around people feeling badly towards you. If you're not OK with doing this yet, that's totally normal and to be expected, but I encourage you to open your mind to the idea of changing your position on this. What if hurting people's feelings is better in the longer-term for everyone involved, including the hurt party? What if hurting someone is a *good* thing, if it means you live with more integrity and protect your circle of friends from dangerous or unhelpful influences? What if it's not even your fault if someone is hurt by your rejection because it's all about their beliefs and nothing to do with your treatment of them?

Allow these questions to percolate through your mind as we now start to explore the dark power of confrontations and ruthless honesty.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Your time is limited, and self-respect means never accepting bad-fit connections into your life.
- If someone is a low-value fit, stop engaging with them, and instead fill your social calendar with good-fit connections and/or new social opportunities (or just be alone for a while).
- Some people need to be actively removed from your life. You'll need to be ruthless.

KEY ACTIONS

- Complete the weeding exercise discussed earlier in this chapter.

The Importance of Confrontations

"I am always amazed by people who know something is wrong but still insist on ignoring it, as if that will somehow make it go away. They spare themselves the confrontation, but end up boiling in resentment anyway."

David Levithan

Why Focus on Confrontations?

Confrontation is an epic topic for me, and one that sits at the heart of why most people frequently engage in dishonesty. For most of my life, I suffered from crippling fear and anxiety around confrontations, more specifically: *conflict* (we'll explore the crucial difference between confrontation and conflict shortly). Many of the people that I have worked with and talked to about confrontations also struggle with this. Unless you're a naturally aggressive or bold person, confrontation is probably the most difficult type of honesty for you. And even if you are naturally confrontational, there's still a good chance that you do it in an unhelpful way that ruins connections or includes some form of dishonesty.

In the next few chapters, we will spend a fair amount of time discussing confrontations, simply because this is where the most gains can be made in terms of becoming a more confident and honest person — a person of *integrity*. Essentially, confrontations are difficult moments of honesty, so if you can confront effectively and without much hesitation, then you can probably be honest about anything. Most people I see are either too scared to confront, or they do it ineffectively: they back down and get walked all over, or they fight back with aggressive and defensive tantrums that only make their lives worse in the long run. We're going to discuss

how to have brave, calm and effective confrontations that build relationships rather than destroy them, while increasing your self-confidence at the same time.

What is a Confrontation?

A confrontation is any form of assertively honest expression that is likely to provoke an uncomfortable emotional reaction inside of you and/or anyone else. To confront simply means to express your preferences, your likes and dislikes, things you want and abhor, to an audience that *may* feel differently and resist you. It's showing a truthful side of yourself that you believe people are unlikely to agree with or approve of, and may even react to with ferocious negativity.

Confrontations include boundary-setting — explaining to others what you like and dislike about them personally — in such a way that challenges their behaviour and possibly demands that they change (e.g. asking someone to refund your money for poor service). Boundary-setting can take many forms, often including the expression of emotions that clearly demonstrate your preferences, such as disgust, anger, disappointment, or even attraction. Confrontations can include asserting your thoughts and beliefs to an audience that may disagree, particularly an audience that may challenge you, discredit you, disown you, or get offended (e.g. telling a room of religious people that you don't believe in God). Confrontations can also be behavioural and non-verbal: *doing* something that is likely to provoke a disapproving reaction from others (e.g. quitting the university course your parents paid for and expect you to finish), or going against social norms.

What is a Conflict?

A *confrontation* should not be confused with a *conflict*, which is more about the emotional reactions people have when being confronted

(or the emotions you feel about initiating a confrontation). A conflict is when one or more people have an emotional loss of control during a confrontation. Put it in this way: a calm and reasonable confrontation is never a conflict.

If you can manage your emotions, or at least your internal response to the rise of emotions, then there won't be a conflict inside you during a confrontation. You will simply be there to witness the other person's emotional reaction. Sure, the reason for the confrontation itself may be a conflict — e.g. standing up to a bully because you're outraged by their behaviour — but the conflict is essentially a separate event from the confrontation. Speaking your mind — the confrontation — can be separated from the resulting emotional reaction — the conflict. They should each be viewed and managed as separate components of an interaction.

We'll carefully separate confrontation from conflict because conflating these two concepts results in one of the greatest struggles for people who are trying to be more honest. In simple terms, a conflict is an emotional reaction to a perceived confrontation, but this actually has very little to do with the confrontation itself, although it will appear to be related. This reaction can occur inside whomever is involved, including yourself, and usually takes the form of emotions that are either aggressive or defensive, such as (but not limited to): anger, outrage, guilt, frustration, annoyance, panic, fear, shame, offence, disgust, vengeance, jealousy and confusion. You can have these feelings even when a confrontation is reasonable, or even when a confrontation is not happening at all!

We use the word conflict to describe these more painful, resistant or 'negative' emotional reactions. Other feelings, like curiosity, understanding, love, interest, happiness and calmness, have no element of conflict in them. If these arise during a confrontation, then we generally label such confrontation as 'just a sharing of information', which is free from conflict; a calm debate between two people who want to help each other and come to a mutually beneficial agreement. It's only when the unpleasant emotions arise that we call it a conflict.

You *cannot* prevent the other person from having a conflict in reaction to your confrontation. No matter how calm, reasonable or

careful you are, there are some people who will react with conflict regardless. Some people are upset simply because they are being confronted. I once made a friend cry just by asking her to "sit down for a chat", and I hadn't even started to explain why I wanted to confront her! She was already in conflict from the moment I opened my mouth. Of course, in this book we will try to give you the best possible chance to avoid conflict without sacrificing honesty, but it's just not possible to control the insecurities and reactions of others. We're much more interested in managing your own inner conflict, so that you are able to have confrontations effectively.

A conflict can also describe what happens inside of you, even if you are the one to initiate the confrontation. If you're nervous, angry, worried, ashamed or upset before/during the confrontation, then you're simultaneously in conflict and confrontation. And if you react to the other person's response with agitated emotions — e.g. you get panicky about them disagreeing with you — then you are in a sense *infected* with *their* conflict. This might happen a lot, and that's OK so long as you understand that this is a separate event from the confrontation. The emotions that accompany the confrontation are not caused by you expressing yourself honestly, they are caused by the beliefs that people involved have about what's being said. Simply put, confrontations don't cause conflict: people's limiting beliefs do.

By these definitions, I don't think anyone is actually afraid of confrontation. It's *the potential for conflict* that scares us. You'll notice there are certain people that you have no problem confronting because, for whatever reason, you're not afraid of their emotional reactions. And this is important to recognise because it's in becoming adept at confrontations that you deal with your fear of conflict. The more you can manage the way you set boundaries to release your shame around expressing preferences, the less a conflict will bother or threaten you. Especially once you learn to let go of controlling the other person's conflict (a skill we will describe in detail soon). Then you become free to confront any person without worrying so much about how everyone feels. It's through mastering confrontations, and thereby increasing your self-respect, that you can finally learn to stop caring about what other people think of you.

The Guy with The Dogs

Recently, while rushing around in the week before we got married, my fiancé and I found out that one of the wedding guests was secretly trying to get his two big dogs allowed into the wedding venue. This guy has a reputation for being underhanded and a bit sneaky — something I'd clashed with him about in the past — and he probably surmised that we'd be against having the dogs at the wedding, so he was going about it in an indirect fashion, to get the dogs approved to be there without us knowing. We only found out because a venue's manager called the best man, asking if this was OK.

When I found out, I was immediately upset (i.e. in conflict). My fiancé was already stressed out and we didn't need this extra burden, particularly as this guy is difficult to confront and usually gets his way through manipulation and relentless pressure. No one else wanted to deal with this issue, so I felt angry about the whole situation and bitter that I had to deal with it. This was my conflict. Although I hadn't spoken to him yet, I was already feeling agitated.

Realising this, I took some deep breaths to moderate my state of being and become more calm, and thereby more rational. I wanted to ensure that I would be cool and collected while managing the ongoing conflict I was experiencing. I wanted this confrontation to be honest, courageous and assertive, and yet still compassionate and respectful. So I asked for his number and dialled with only slightly shaking hands.

When he answered, I breezed quickly through the pleasantries and cut straight to the chase. I told him in clear terms that there could be no dogs at the wedding, and that he'd need to make alternative arrangements. I then went silent to allow him to respond. He came back expressing surprise about my hardline stance and disappointment that I'd "put him in a difficult position last-minute," and then he tried to guilt-trip me while pleading for leniency, saying that the dogs were quiet, easy to manage, and "like my own children." This was *his* conflict. Had I reacted to this with guilt, outraged defensiveness, apology, or any other highly emotional outburst, then I would have been *infected by his conflict.*

To bring this conversation back to it just being a confrontation, allowing him to be conflicted by himself without dragging me in as well, I simply heard him out, waited for him to finish, and then said: "I understand, but there's no room for movement on this. Either you come without the dogs or you don't come." It went back and forth a bit in the same fashion, but no matter how he came at me I just responded with the original confrontation. I must have sounded like a recorded message looping over and over. I refused to argue against his counterpoints or get distracted from the main message. I didn't justify or explain my position, I didn't try to convince him I was right. I just repeated the boundary until I was done with the conversation.

There were no dogs at the wedding.

Over the next few chapters, we're going to explore how to maintain resilience and calmness during confrontations, by ensuring that you know how to manage your own conflicts while simultaneously resisting any temptation to be sucked into the conflicts that others are experiencing.

Confrontation Phobia

My biggest fear growing up was the fear of conflict, although I thought of it as a fear of confrontation, since I linked the two in my mind. I assumed that all confrontation came with conflict; that I couldn't stand up for myself without getting upset and/or upsetting others. I was more afraid of conflict than I was of death. I had an extreme emotional response whenever it appeared that someone was going to disagree with me, or get angry, or be disappointed in me, or challenge me to a fight, or even simply misunderstand me. All it would take was a frown of disapproval or aggressive eye-contact and BOOM! — emotional meltdown for me.

In the face of a potential show-down, my throat would swell like I'd swallowed a hot lump of meat, locking me up so badly that I couldn't dare to speak — it always felt like the attempt to talk would cause me to cry (which I found, at the time, to be extremely embarrassing). My knees and hands would begin to shake from

the adrenaline surging through my veins, my heartbeat would be pounding in my ears, and my stomach would churn with queasiness as all my energy resources were drafted for the upcoming battle I thought was about to happen.

What baffles me to this day is that I still don't have a clear understanding as to why I was afraid. I was not raised in an abusive home or embattled environment. If anything, I was probably sheltered a little too much, which may go some way to explaining my mental fragility when it came to emotional conflict. I didn't get in many fights at school, and my parents were mostly fair and reasonable when it came to discipline (they never used violence or shouting or insults etc.). Nonetheless, conflict terrified me and led me to avoid confrontation, as I blamed confrontation for being the cause of painful emotions.

One way we tend to view conflict is as the direct manifestation of someone's disapproval of us. For as far back as I can remember, before I started serious self-development, I consistently reacted with fear to the idea of being disliked. Confrontations seemed to be the evidence of dislike, a certainty of what I feared coming to life: proof that I was not good enough and unlovable, at least in someone's opinion. Because I believed that a confrontation was the same thing as a conflict, I would assume that if someone ever confronted me then they *also* felt badly about me, i.e. they no longer liked me. I couldn't conceive of someone confronting me without changing their overall love for me. If a girlfriend simply disagreed with me in even a slightly emotional way, I'd assume she was no longer in love with me and that the relationship was over.

To avoid conflict, I *prevented* confrontation. Through behaviours such as people-pleasing, keeping conversations superficial, being funny, and engaging my overdeveloped mediation skills at the slightest sign of disagreement, I was able to consistently navigate away from potential confrontations and prevented them from occurring. I would even struggle to allow other people to confront or conflict. Strangely, I could throw myself in-between two guys brawling violently, just to prevent further conflict. I remember once coming home from a night on the town absolutely coated from neck to waist in some other dude's blood after trying to protect

him from getting his arse kicked by a stronger lad. It's like I would rather get physically hurt than experience the emotional discomfort of witnessing others in conflict.

Many, many of my coaching clients and BROJO community members have a similar fear of conflict that they need to overcome. For whatever reason, they have been raised to believe that any confrontation is 'bad' and will always result in conflict, which is also bad. Either they try to prevent and avoid confrontation, as I once did, or they react to it with immediate conflict, often escalating even basic boundary-setting conversations into outraged battles that destroy connections and relationships. I have met very few people in my life who know how to manage confrontations in a healthy and productive way without becoming overly conflicted and reactive.

People often reference death and public speaking as their top fears or phobias, and it amazes me how infrequently confrontation is brought up. Perhaps I'm biased by my audience, but I anecdotally see that fear of conflict (through confrontation) causes much greater restriction to honesty than almost any other fear I'm aware of. Maybe death and public speaking are possibly both types of confrontation — death being the darkest truth we have to face, and public speaking being an arena that could provoke mass conflict. That is not to say that no one is able to engage in confrontation, but it's uncommon for someone to manage confrontations well and without conflict. We still have hatred, war, crime, domestic violence, and other forms of harmful conflicts. Not to mention all the passive- or covert- aggressive backstabbing in the workplace and amongst even the closest of friends.

I don't think I'm being too biased in saying that humans have a long way to go in their ability to express anger, frustration and annoyance in a healthy way — to confront instead of creating conflict, and to handle being confronted. People will hold back and try to avoid taking a stand until anger, bitterness and frustration flood over the sandbags. This is when you see someone erupt emotionally over things that may appear petty and small. Put it this way: very few people seem capable of calmly and rationally maintaining their boundaries, using anger as an assertive force rather than having it manifest in defensiveness or aggression.

Perhaps it's something we should all be working on.

"Are You Implying that Confrontation is a Good Thing?"

You bet your sweet arse I am. We only believe confrontation is 'bad' or harmful because we blame honesty for the conflicts that both we and others experience. I once saw confrontation as a failure, as evidence of my inability to communicate or create harmony in earlier stages of an interaction. I saw confrontation as the end-result of poor communication skills and unhealthy relationships. But I was blind to any alternative, despite frequent competing evidence (e.g. married couples arguing but still loving each other for years). I had become irrationally attached to a false belief that inner confidence and good connections were created from pleasurable experiences, therefore conflict must be avoided at all costs. I saw confrontations as being unpleasant — as being the cause of conflict — so I naturally assumed they were also bad for confidence and relationships.

For the longest time, it didn't occur to me that there was a direct link between my unwillingness to confront people, my low self-confidence, and my inability to create deeply meaningful connections and relationships. In my limited understanding, I believed that confidence had something to do with always being happy, or at least emotionally unaffected. Therefore, I thought that any conflicting emotions, such as anger or being upset, could not fit into the category of confidence. You may feel that way too. It took me many years to realize how wrong I was.

Martin Luther King Jr. Nelson Mandela. Malala Yousafzai. What do these people all have in common? They are leaders who have faced severe disapproval for standing up for what they believed in (whether you like or agree with them is irrelevant to my point). They have confronted people publicly, in spite of reactions of outrage, anger and upset. They have had their confrontations met with hostility, disapproval, and even violence. And yet there can be little doubt that they are each also incredibly self-confident.

King's public confrontation of race issues led him to face multiple threats on his life. He risked his wellbeing by engaging in confrontations, in order to live by his values, and was willing to pay the ultimate price. Mandela endured decades in prison for standing up against *apartheid* in South Africa, even though he was given the opportunity to back down and receive a safe haven as a reward. Yousafzai boldly faced up to the local Taliban regime — the fucking *Taliban* — just to fight for women's educational rights, and continued to confront the entire world on women's rights even after *being shot in the head* for her trouble.

Once again, what do they all have in common? They are confident, and they are no strangers to confrontation. They not only face it, but provoke it willingly, and tolerate conflict on a regular basis as an inevitable reaction for speaking honestly. You don't need high-profile role-models like these to see evidence that confrontation is regularly experienced and exercised by confident people. Look around. *Really* look around. Notice that people who are sure of themselves also stand up for what they believe in, and are willing to risk social disapproval in order to express themselves. Notice also how the healthiest relationships have regular boundary-setting (you may need to look past the façade that many put on in public).

The evidence that confidence and confrontation are bound together in a relationship has been right in front of you your entire life. However, it's been easy to confuse healthy, confident confrontation with unhealthy, irrational conflict. Often, we lump these in together, yet they are worlds apart. So, in the next few chapters, we'll have a look at the benefits of confrontation, and further define the difference between confrontation and conflict. We'll explore in more depth how confrontation will build your confidence and connections with others, and then finally — with your mind ready to overcome your fears — we'll look at practical guidance on how to have an effective, healthy and confidence-building confrontation.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- A confrontation is stating your preferences in an assertively honest manner.
- A conflict is the emotional reaction that occurs before, during or after a confrontation, but is a separate event (i.e. a confrontation can occur without conflict).
- Many of us are terrified of confrontation but this is only because we equate it with conflict.
- We assume that confident mindsets and healthy relationships do not include confrontation and conflicting emotions, yet many confidence role-models clearly disprove this.
- Open your mind to the possibility that confrontation will actually benefit your life and confidence, once you learn more about it and how to do it in a healthy way.

KEY ACTIONS

- Write a list of recent events where you either avoided confrontation or blew up and had an unhelpful conflict.
- Write a list of situations that regularly occur in your life where you wish you could be better at confrontations. Next to each of these, list the benefits you'd receive in your life if you were better at confrontation.

The Benefits of Confrontation

"Any psychologist will tell you that healing comes from honest confrontation with our injury or with our past. Whatever that thing is that has hurt us or traumatized us, until we face it head on, we will have issues moving forward in a healthy way."

Nate Parker

Why I Love Confrontation... and Why You Should Too

There are five main reasons why I believe confrontations are not only helpful but necessary. Over the next two chapters, we will explore these in detail. These chapters are here to help you open your mind to being curious, and possibly even enthusiastic, about the idea of bringing more confrontation into your life.

Confrontations have the potential to:

Deepen your relationships and connections with others. I know, sounds ridiculous to some of you, right? How can confronting someone possibly improve a relationship? We'll answer that in a minute.

Allow you to build your self-worth, through increased courage, awareness and self-respect, as well as encouraging others to respect you more.

Help you give to the world all of who you are; by sharing controversial or polarising ideas and beliefs you can help others either feel connected or wiser.

Prevent most conflicts from occurring. Really. And we'll explore how conflicts themselves must be confronted.

Provide a powerful defense against manipulation. People can only 'get' you (successfully manipulate you) if you're unwilling to provoke and/or experience certain uncomfortable emotional states. Once you can willingly endure these emotions, i.e. face up to conflicts, no one will be able to get inside your head and fuck with you.

In this chapter, we'll focus on the first three. Before we do, let's further explore 'boundary setting' — where values meet confrontation — because this is the most important type of confrontation a person needs to have.

Setting Boundaries

When confrontation is used to set someone straight on what your values are (and how they must behave in order to respect those values), we will call this 'setting boundaries'. Essentially, this is exactly what it sounds like: a boundary-line that someone is not allowed to cross. You educate someone on your definition of 'bad' behaviour, and ideally, what the alternative 'good' behaviour could be instead, so that they can see a clear boundary-line between good and bad. Bad behaviour is anything someone does that breaches your values, morals or ethics, particularly when this involves you directly. There is an art to knowing the difference between boundary-setting and controlling manipulation. We'll try not to interfere with how others choose to live: boundary-setting is reserved for times when their choices on how they live violate our principles in some way that affects us negatively, and so cannot be tolerated.

Setting boundaries is really nothing more than honestly expressing disagreement with someone's behaviour, and in some cases with their stated beliefs and intentions. It is not an attempt to change them by force, but instead *an invitation for them to consider the option of treating you or others with more respect.* If they choose to reject this invitation, there may be consequences (e.g. the end of

a friendship), but these consequences are not a punishment tool used to coerce or otherwise manipulate them. Setting a boundary is like drawing a line in the sand: it's up to them whether they cross that line, and they will clearly know what happens if they do. Think of it like speeding laws: the police don't force you to drive under a certain speed, they simply make you aware of how they'll react if they catch you doing it, and the rest is up to you.

Simply put, setting a boundary is where you honestly confront someone and say: "I'd prefer if you didn't do that, and instead I would like you to do this." Then you simply allow them to choose an option, and you react accordingly. If they respect your boundary, they are entitled to privileges like your time, attention, love, friendship, energy and support. If they choose not to, you will redirect those privileges elsewhere and they will miss out. These privileges are not a bargaining chip. This is simply a cause-and-effect sequence: valued-behaviour leads to privileges while disrespectful behaviour does not. People who respect me get my best treatment, but I don't mistreat people who disrespect me, I simply don't give them more than a basic courtesy.

Confrontations Improve Relationships

In my early years, as I've already mentioned, I avoided confrontations like the plague. I figured that if a relationship was free of arguments, disagreement and anger, it must be a good relationship. I don't know if I've ever been more wrong about something in my life!

In my first long-term relationship, there were almost no confrontations at all. As a people-pleasing Nice Guy, I simply submitted to almost any request my girlfriend put forward and I would quickly back down if a disagreement got even close to becoming emotional. Whatever she wanted, I provided. Whatever she believed, I agreed. The entire time I told myself that I simply didn't care that much, that I was easy-going, or that I was a great guy for being so understanding. What a load of bullshit.

The pure and simple truth was that I was afraid of being dumped, and, to a lesser degree, afraid of being faced with her emotions and not knowing how to handle them (or my own for that matter). On one occasion, I did actually argue with her. I was so convinced that the relationship would end because of it that I was genuinely shocked when she didn't dump me. It simply never occurred to me that it was possible for a relationship to survive an emotionally charged argument. This was how bad my fear of conflict was. Ironically, when she later broke up with me, one of the main reasons was that I was *too* easy-going which, it turned out, was both boring and frustrating for her.

What I've realized is that when you do not confront someone who crosses your boundaries, people will struggle to *trust* you. It's just impossible to trust someone who isn't bothered by anything, or is bothered but won't protect themselves in any way. It's too unreal. We all know, as humans, that everyone must be bothered by *something*, so when you are faced with someone who seems unfazed and totally agreeable all the time, your suspicion will almost always be provoked (unless you're totally naïve). It feels manipulative, probably because that's exactly what it is. And when someone *is* bothered but fails to stand up for themselves, we can't trust that they would have our back in a fight either.

When you express to people that you're generally OK with everything, they will start to feel uncomfortable in your presence. Deep down, they sense that you must be lying, or they lose their own self-worth because your 'perfection' makes them feel inferior. They'll start to worry that you're secretly building up resentment, or that you're just a robot who doesn't feel anything. It's very difficult to connect with someone who doesn't care about anything, and it's impossible to feel completely safe with someone when you can't tell when they're upset.

When you set reasonable boundaries and show that certain things consistently bother you, it's easier to believe you when you're *genuinely* not bothered. It gives people a sense of your preferences that they can trust. The more I know about your likes and dislikes, the more I know you as a person. As I get to know you, if you're showing me consistent boundaries then I will start to be better

able to predict what's cool for you and what isn't. This predictability is the essence of trust. This allows me to respect you and relax in your presence.

With my wife Lucie, I've learned how to draw the lines. I've shown her what I disagree with, find unenjoyable, dislike about her behaviour, and don't believe in. She does the same with me. The beautiful thing about this is that we don't need to agree. To some extent she must 'obey' some of my boundaries. For example, if she was to hurt my family members, that would be a deal-breaker for me (she never has). But, most of the time, she isn't obliged to do anything when I confront her. I'm just expressing who I am. For example, she remains firmly Catholic while I'm an atheist. We can both express differences here without the other needing to change in any way. But if I were to pretend to believe in God, she'd start to feel that something was 'off' and would lose both trust and respect for me.

She expressed to me that she feels uneasy if I'm too agreeable. Early on in our relationship, she once said, in an exasperated way, "You seem to like *everything*". This was a warning sign: she was starting to feel unsafe and suspicious. I'd heard this before — it was a pattern of dishonesty I'd brought to many, if not all, of my previous relationships. When I tell her firmly that I don't like something, or that I'm feeling angry, she knows where I stand and knows I can stand up for myself, and that I'm not being fake. As a wise man once told me about women, "If she knows you can stand up *to* her, she'll believe you can stand up *for* her."

If you can let go of the need to 'win' your arguments (we'll discuss this in one of the following chapters), you'll see that confrontations are simply a way of letting the people in your life know where you stand on certain issues. It reassures them that you're honest and will not tolerate harmful things, therefore you're trustworthy, safe, and courageous. If you don't do this, you have no chance of creating a deep and real connection. And if you genuinely believe that *nothing* about a person *ever* bothers you, you're lying to yourself and to them.

Of course, sometimes friends, family members and partners have frequent 'arguments' that eventually destroy their relationships. But these are not really confrontations as I've defined them, they're

conflicts. Overreacting, taking things personally, vengeance, getting defensive, being nasty and manipulative, trying to win — these are all characteristics of conflicts and not of healthy confrontations. Yet, relationship disasters often get blamed on confrontations when the real culprits are the conflict-reactions. Don't blame confrontations for your poorly managed conflicts!

Confrontations Increase Self-Worth

If you do not confront people who cross your boundaries, you are disrespecting yourself. For anyone who has struggled with confrontations and boundary-setting: you must surely be seeing evidence by now that this negatively affects your self-worth. How much you value yourself is not only *measured* by how respectful your behaviour is towards yourself, it is in fact *determined* by it. The more you allow people to mistreat you or breach your values in other ways — through not being honest about your feelings — the less valuable you'll believe you are. Each avoidance of confrontation is like a sacrifice, stabbing your confidence with a knife. Eventually, it bleeds to death from a thousand small cuts.

How many nights have you laid awake, fuming over what you *should have* said, and beating yourself up for being a pussy who doesn't stand up for yourself? How many times have you felt the unpleasant wash of shame run through your body as yet another douchebag is allowed to dominate you, abuse you, and cause you to miss out on a better life? How many times have you hesitated to speak your mind and then beaten yourself up for missing yet another opportunity? How many times have you failed to protect someone you care about just because you didn't want to feel a bit uncomfortable?

When you hold back from stating your boundaries, you send yourself a very clear message: "What I believe in is not worth discussing, and what I want is not worth asking for." Think about it in this way: if you give someone else the freedom to state their views and express their feelings, that's an act of respect, right? So, what does it mean when you refuse to give yourself this opportunity and freedom? How would a child feel if you always told them to

shut up and keep their thoughts to themselves? This is what you do to yourself when you back down.

There is no one on this planet who can harm your self-worth more than you can. There are many ways we all do this, but my experience teaches me that none are as prevalent and harmful as not standing up for yourself. Think about how unworthy you feel when your partner or friend or boss doesn't stand up for you when they should. You're doing the same thing to yourself every time you 'pick your battles' and choose not to speak your mind. You *invalidate* yourself.

I remember a clear incident where I boldly stood up for what I believed in. This may have even been the first proper boundary I ever initiated on my own. I had been going through my first real authenticity-development phase at the time, and was testing out new ideas. One of those ideas was to live courageously with integrity even if it meant that other people wouldn't like me.

One day at work, I went into the lunchroom and was presented with the perfect opportunity. There was a table of about six of my colleagues eating lunch together, and they were all laughing. I eavesdropped as I started microwaving my rice and chicken, and realized that they were laughing at someone else's expense. A new staff member had recently been given a tour of the building, and everyone present at the lunch table was just going to town on her: taking the piss out of her voice, the way she looked, and her personality. It was cruel. I felt super uncomfortable listening to it.

Now, the previous me would have probably just walked out, or even joined in with the gossipy banter so that I could feel like I belonged. At best, maybe I would have tried to change the topic discreetly. But this time I asked myself: "What would a confident guy do?" The answer scared the shit out of me: I had to confront a whole group of my peers. Not only that, this was a group of people who were clearly comfortable talking shit about someone behind their back, so there was a very high possibility that I would be the next subject of their derision if I spoke out. It's moments like these that define integrity, and define who we're going to be.

I gathered my courage, accepted the nervous, panicky heat raging through my body, and made my peace with the inevitable worldwide

abandonment my mind told me I was about to experience. Blushing profusely, I took a deep breath and spoke up. "Hey guys, I'm pretty sure you wouldn't be saying this stuff if that person was here in this room, so it's probably not cool to be saying it behind her back, right?"

Everyone went dead silent.

I waited anxiously to get fired, tarred and feathered, and possibly burnt at the stake. But then suddenly, an incredible and unexpected phenomenon occurred. As they stared at me blankly, I noticed that their faces slowly turned an ever-deeper shade of red. They were blushing worse than me, and I realized that they were *embarrassed*. At first, I thought that they were simply embarrassed for me because I had spoken against the group, but then, as one by one they started mumbling apologies and avoiding each other's eyes, I realised they were feeling ashamed of *themselves*.

As I walked out of the room, I felt a massive surge of self-worth, like nothing I had ever experienced before. I had stepped off the edge of the abandonment cliff, taking a massive risk simply in order to express myself honestly. Not only did it feel thrilling, but I also helped the whole group realize that they were not living by their own values. Few people are proud of themselves for gossiping and back-stabbing, they simply do it to hide their own insecurities and to fit in with the group. I had called it out and set them straight.

Ultimately, their reaction was irrelevant. Maybe they started talking shit about me as soon as I left the room. Sometimes I say things that I know are true, and the audience still hates me. There have been plenty of times where I've posted something online, or said something I believe in during a speech, and received an immediate negative backlash. But when I have the presence of mind to see past my neediness for approval and acceptance, I usually feel pretty damn good about myself the next day. Sometimes I'm wrong, and the response I get teaches me something. Yet this still helps improve my self-worth since it increases my wisdom and adaptability. Confidence can only be *gained* from standing up for your beliefs: you either get stronger or wiser. Disrespecting yourself brings you nothing.

Confrontation Is A Form of Giving

It might seem strange that I would say that being confrontational is an act of giving, particularly if you believe that assertiveness 'causes' conflict and therefore hurts people. So before we go any further, allow me to share my definition of *assertiveness*: it's the use of power to express yourself fully. It's a controlled expression of the emotional state of anger to stand up for yourself (and others) in the face of resistance and risk to your integrity. It's neither good nor bad, it's just energy in motion.

Assertiveness is one of those concepts that can be inspirational for others. Meek people are often both intimidated and inspired by assertiveness, so standing up for yourself can serve as a motivational demonstration for others to be moved by. But for now, when it comes to explaining how assertive confrontations give value to people, I want to focus on a specific form of assertiveness: our old friend, *setting boundaries.*

When Lucie and I first talked about becoming an exclusive couple, we had a frank conversation about what this would mean. For Lucie, it primarily meant that I would not engage sexually with any other woman, or date other women in a romantic way. There were also some other non-negotiables, like I couldn't use drugs excessively, or abuse or manipulate her. Just as importantly, she also identified which of my less-than-desirable behaviours were *not* dealbreakers — annoying things I did that she would learn to accept. If I choose to accept these terms of agreement, she will commit to me with loyalty, love and respect. It was make or break. So, how is this an act of *giving*?

To answer that question, let's explore what it's like to be in a relationship or partnership with someone where you *don't* know what the boundaries are. This is the kind of relationship where all expectations are silently projected onto the other person — the old "they should just know what to do" rule. Have you ever been in one of these connections? It's a circus of mind-reading and hope being crushed by bitterness and disappointment. You end up constantly having communication break-downs because everything is subtle, implicit, and secretly expected, rather than directly stated. Both of

you experience a build-up of anxiety as you wait to learn the hard way what is unacceptable. It's only a matter of time before either a massive conflict breaks out or you slowly end up drifting apart on a bitter sea of resentment and confusion.

Many of my coaching clients will describe a relationship like this by saying, "I just can't win." I know what they mean. I've been in relationships, work partnerships, and friendships where it seems like the rules change daily and without warning. One day, buying them flowers is the sweetest thing in the world to do, the next day it's seen as condescending and false. For weeks, it's OK to leave your clothes on the floor, then suddenly it's the biggest issue on Earth. You end up walking on eggshells, trying to guess all the rules and worrying about where the next breach will occur.

When you fail to assert boundaries, you leave the other person in the dark. They don't know how to safely interact with you, which often will trigger them into people-pleasing or avoidant behaviours. The more aggressive people will slip into an automatic domination-mode, and just walk all over you. Either way, odds are that they will not be encouraged to live by their own values, so everyone involved in the situation eventually loses. When you fail to set boundaries, the most likely outcome is that you will bring out the worst in others, like manipulation, indirect and dishonest communication, and needy self-doubt.

I noticed this in the workplace. When I was promoted to Senior Probation Officer, I understood my role as being a 'helper', which I translated into people-pleasing behaviour. No matter how busy I was, I would never say "no" to someone's request for assistance, and because I was almost always given praise and gratitude, I thought it was the right way to go about doing things. Unfortunately, I was setting a precedent. Eventually, people started to get complacent and would interrupt me multiple times per hour with superficial requests that they could easily have resolved by themselves. My lack of boundary-setting *enabled* them, encouraging them to become needy, dependent and disrespectful. When I finally did start saying "no", their gratitude was quickly replaced by sulky resentment.

It can be terrifying to honestly and accurately set boundaries, particularly because most people think that to do so is the opposite

of giving. We often believe that we are being a burden to others when we ask for what we want and demand a stop to what we don't want. We worry that we've become inconvenient and selfish, when in reality others will be *relieved* when the boundaries are clarified. This is something you must see to believe, and it may take some practice before you can do it with powerful honesty and emotional stability, but you already know it from being on the receiving end: isn't it just so much better when you don't have to *guess* what someone wants?

Of course, I understand why you feel hesitant to set firm boundaries, and why you might see assertiveness as rude, selfish or harmful. I felt that same resistance for most of my life. We're afraid, aren't we? We don't see confrontation as giving through boundary-setting, we see it as provoking rage, hatred, rejection, violence, or other painful repercussions through trying to challenge someone. What helped me get past this barrier was understanding that *I don't have to control their reaction*. I will repeat this point many times throughout this book, to emphasize the burden you unwittingly carry, preventing you from practicing shameless honesty.

The reason you might currently feel that confrontational boundary-setting is 'bad' is because you see it as a means of manipulating someone else's behaviour. It feels like taking something from them rather than giving. But setting boundaries does not require their participation, agreement, or even consent. They don't have to give back! You're giving them the opportunity and guidance to respect you and understand how to best interact with you. They don't have to respond positively; you can relieve yourself of that burden. Let them decide for themselves.

If you don't stand up for what you believe in, you are living dishonestly. You might believe that living dishonestly is a form of giving. You may think that keeping your disagreements to yourself saves other people from uncomfortable emotions. I hope that you can question this belief. I challenge you to provide evidence that dishonesty around boundaries truly serves someone in the long-term. If nothing else, at least be honest with yourself about why you don't do it: you're scared of not being able to handle their reaction.

Let's say you have a partner who crosses a boundary, by asking you to cancel plans you've made with your friends because she's decided at the last minute that she wants a quiet night in with you. You might think that it would be a selfish act to say "no" because it would make her feel unwanted and angry toward you, and might lead to creating a reputation of you being a cold-hearted boyfriend. This is the kind of script or story that many people attach to assertiveness.

So, you postpone your plans with friends for the next week. Only when next week arrives, the same last-minute request happens again, and again you comply. Now a pattern is forming. By complying with their unreasonable requests and not prioritizing your needs twice in a row, you have set a precedent and designated the foundation of roles within this relationship. You are now *the one who moves aside for her*. She is now *the one entitled to make last-minute unreasonable demands.*

Are you still so sure that this will serve you both in the longer term? Are you even aware of how this affects your regularly disappointed friends? Do you really think this arrangement is going to end well for you? Maybe you know it won't but you think to yourself, "At least I'm making her happy," and you're able to convince yourself that you are being giving. Well, let's face some truths and investigate that a little deeper.

What lesson is your partner learning from this experience? Firstly, she is being encouraged to boss you around and see you as having a lower status than herself. Secondly, she hasn't learned to accept that in real life things will not always go her way. You're *spoiling* her. And thirdly, this is likely a long-term pattern of behaviour in her relationships, so you're enabling this unhealthy demanding behaviour to continue. She's being encouraged to be selfish and disrespectful — you're *rewarding* her for it. Do you still think it's no big deal? Do you still think you're generously giving?

Imagine that you eventually break up with her, which is almost inevitable given the build-up of resentment on both sides (she will resent and distrust you for being weak even though she asked you to, because you failed to show integrity). Your partner is now screwed for the long-term future. What if her next partner isn't

such a pushover? Your partner thinks she is doing everything right because it 'worked' with you, and now she's losing love and opportunities because you never had the guts to call out her shitty behaviour. And of course, you're off seeking another insecure control-freak to serve *your* established pattern.

All of this is basically a composite true story. I've seen it occur over and over again, and I've even created this one myself. I've seen my ex-girlfriends constantly struggle to find love after leaving me, and I wonder how things might have been different had I grown some balls and pointed out their unhealthy behaviour and given them the feedback they so sorely needed. We'll never know… because I never spoke up. I withheld that gift from them. And I repeated my Nice Guy patterns in relationships for many years before I saw the problem, making the same mistakes over and over again, because none of my partners gave me the brutally honest feedback I so sorely needed.

Being unassertive is the opposite of giving because it usually means that you have *condoned unhelpful behaviour.* You've effectively helped them screw up their future. You've also made them dependent on you, which sets them up to be incapable and insecure. You've done nothing for them and nothing for yourself. If, however, you assert yourself at the beginning and endure that small amount of discomfort, they learn respect and they learn how to create a balanced relationship. You respect yourself and create more time to connect with your friends. All the guys I know who gave up their friends for a needy partner are now lonely and full of regret. And if you're currently in this situation, it's not too late! By the end of the next couple of chapters, you'll have everything you need to reset the meter.

Because Lucie and I clearly laid out what we would and would not tolerate from each other as partners, we rarely have any conflicts. We know what we each signed up for, and cannot get resentful at each other for being ourselves. And we regularly check in to reassess and adjust our boundaries. We had another assertive, boundary-setting discussion before we got married, but because we had laid such a solid foundation there was really nothing to discuss. We are consistently assertive with each other, and prepared to engage in uncomfortable conversations whenever a topic arises

that might threaten our relationship even a little. And that is one of the main reasons our relationship remains so healthy.

The funny thing is, people will probably like you *more* if you assert yourself. Setting boundaries is undeniable evidence of self-respect, and self-respect is attractive and reassuring. Assertiveness gives people the gift of hope: you give them a chance to aspire to greatness as they look up to you as a role-model — one of the few truly assertive people in their lives. They trust that you can stand up for what's right. They feel safe to know that they will get called out on their own bullshit and self-sabotage. They might even be able to learn how to respect themselves from modelling your behaviour. Hey, that's how I learned it! All the best things I learned about self-respect were originally modelled off confident people I admired.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Essentially, confrontation is about using honesty to set boundaries, which allows people to trust you and know you deeply.
- When you don't set boundaries, you set a precedent that will be hard to break, and will cause resentment over time.
- Other people often struggle to live by their own values, and your boundary-setting can help encourage them back on track.
- If nothing else, even if they all hate you, you'll respect yourself for being assertive when it matters.

KEY ACTIONS

- Identify one person in your life who would benefit from your boundary setting, and contact them today to tell them about it. Choose something small that you can handle (just a bit uncomfortable, not terrifying).

How Confrontation Protects You

"Be peaceful, be courteous, obey the law, respect everyone; but if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery."

Malcolm X

Confrontations Prevent Conflict

It seems counterintuitive to think that confronting someone is *less* likely to lead to a conflict than not. You speak your mind, they take it personally and overreact, and boom! — you're now fighting it out. Many people assume confrontation is *always* a catalyst for conflict, because that's either how it always goes for them, or they simply assume that's how it always goes for everyone (and never test this assumption).

Turn the tables and think for a minute about why you get upset when someone speaks their mind and confronts you. What is it that bothers you so much about someone challenging you or having a different perspective? Is it because you think that their views will harm people you love, or yourself? Is it because you're worried that they'll turn others against you? Is it because you're afraid they'll somehow get inside your head and change who you are? If they're right and you're wrong, will you lose something important that you cannot live without?

While it can be any or all of these reasons, what I've observed is that so often — particularly in close relationships — the main issue is simply *surprise*. The defensive conflict most people have when confronted seems to stem mainly from a kind of emotional shock. Humans can react to the sensation of being surprised in many different ways. When the magician pulls the rabbit out of the hat,

we laugh and shake our heads in admiration. When a wise person you look up to presents a ground-breaking new perspective for looking at the world, you feel a pleasurable swell of insight that replaces your confusion. But when your little brother jumps out of the cupboard and scares the crap out of you, rage instantly takes over and you punch him in the stomach. And it's this last example that I believe is most relevant to our struggles with confrontation.

A friend recently confided in me about a conflict with her boyfriend. She had gotten drunk with him, something they had never done together before. Due to her tendency to become emotionally vulnerable and aggressive when drinking, she usually avoids alcohol, but this time she felt safe and didn't think any harm would come from it. The next day she awoke, and while she couldn't clearly remember the night before, he seemed to be fine so she assumed she must have behaved herself well.

Later, however, he started gradually expressing anger at the way she had conducted herself. He kept asking questions like, "Are you usually like this when you drink?" and "Do I have to worry about your self-control when you're drinking?" This eventually escalated into a conflict where he revealed that she had behaved quite disrespectfully the night before. Then he started saying that he no longer trusted her ability to stay faithful to him. This point was confusing for her, it seemed like a *non-sequitur*, because there was never any behaviour on her part that could be interpreted as evidence of potential cheating. She'd always been sexually faithful.

What she didn't realize is that she had *surprised* him with her drunken behaviour. When we are surprised by someone we love, it can go one of two ways. Either we're delighted with this new aspect of someone, or we are shocked and frightened by its implications. In this case, her boyfriend saw a harmful destructive side of her — she became irrational and unexpectedly enraged during her drinking — and so he made the mental calculation that this meant that all other things about her, like her previous sexual loyalty, were also no longer certain. Her *unpredictability*, combined with his insecurity about being cheated on, created this conclusion for him.

Why do I bring up this example? Because when my friend and I worked backward from the conflict with her boyfriend, we

found *hidden resentment*. She had been holding back on truthful confrontations during the weeks preceding the drinking incident. He had behaved in ways that upset her on a number of occasions, yet she said nothing at the time because — unbeknownst to her — she was afraid that a confrontation would hurt their relationship. Once she got drunk, her inhibitions were removed and all that pent-up bitterness came blasting out with incoherent rage. So many small crimes had gone unpunished over time that she didn't even know what she was upset about! Her conflict triggered his conflict, and it all ended up in a big, confused, irrational mess.

I see this so often in relationships of all kinds. People build up and then explode over tiny provocations and don't understand why. They fail to realize that by the time they detonate, there has already been a massive accumulation of past grievances because disagreements have not been managed in a healthy way through confrontation. Conflicts are therefore often not the result of confrontation, they are in fact the consequence of not confronting when it needs to happen. Yet the confrontation that finally brings conflicts out unfairly gets the blame for causing them.

You'll end up quitting your job just because someone stole your favourite stapler, when in reality if you had just taken a stand on the little things that bothered you earlier, the stapler wouldn't matter to you at all now. You dump your partner for sending a flirty text to a friend, yet this text would be of little consequence had you been more honest about jealousy you felt earlier in the relationship. Your desire to 'keep the peace' and 'pick your battles' through holding back from confrontation is what sets the stage for a huge blow-out. You're much better off calling out *every* grievance, no matter how small and petty, so they don't accumulate into a toxic mental sludge.

Until you're certain that you are bold enough to confront your partner every single time, and assert your boundaries when they are crossed no matter what, don't 'pick your battles' — fight them all! Bring up *everything* that bothers you, even when it seems inconsequential, petty, or pointless to discuss. Get used to quickly releasing frustration, disappointment and shock by being honest and confrontational whenever these feelings arise. You don't need to win the battles, just respect yourself by speaking up. It will prevent most conflicts from arising (you deal with shit while it's still

small), and you'll be far less likely to explode later over some minor inconvenience. Bickering over small things is far less damaging to a connection than holding it all in until you explode.

Confrontation Prevents Manipulation

A clever salesman knows that he can make you buy almost anything if he can simply handle more emotional discomfort than you while he pressures you to keep your own discomfort hidden. Manipulation requires only one thing to be effective: *secrecy*. Specifically, secrecy about how you feel. Confrontation is simple honesty, and despite the belief many people have about needing to appear 'strong' when being assertive, assertiveness is simply stating a truth. That truth may be that you feel some form of 'weakness' in reaction to the other person's behaviour. You don't need to be strong to confront, only honest and assertive.

And if you're willing to confront someone, no matter how you feel, it will be nearly impossible for them to manipulate you. When I worked for Corrections, there was only one guaranteed way I was going to get manipulated, and that was when I backed down from confrontation due to hidden discomfort. If I was secretive about feeling scared, confused, frustrated or flattered by someone's behaviour, I became open to being influenced and easily manipulated away from my values.

Let's explore some real-life examples of times where offenders successfully manipulated me. I'll show you how confrontation could prevent this from happening, and also describe some of the different types of manipulation for you to be aware of. Confronting people about their manipulation directly is the quickest way to shut it down. But for you to do this, you need to first understand what manipulation really is.

Intimidation

One of the clearest examples of being manipulated through intimidation happened while I was working as a Probation Officer.

I was still pretty new, and up to that point had only been assigned to work with easy-to-manage cases: low-level and compliant offenders who did what they were supposed to and wanted to change. Then, one day I got allocated to work with Greg.[24] He was assessed as a high-risk offender, and had a thick criminal history file — a lifetime of anti-social behaviour.

For the first few weeks, all was well and good, until one week he tested my boundaries by failing to report in to see me as per his legal obligations. He failed to show up the following week too, despite receiving a final warning letter. I had no choice, I had to 'breach' him, which meant charging him with a criminal offence and sending him back to Court. After his court case, he came in to see me. All the report-in office rooms were unavailable that day, so I chose to meet with him in a secluded hallway instead, because I didn't want to keep him waiting.

Big mistake.

This was the first time I experienced what it was like to be trapped in a confined space with a big, angry, violent criminal who didn't like me. Greg shouted. He loomed over me. He accused me of favouritism. No direct threats were made — he probably didn't even view his behaviour as aggressive by his standards — but I was significantly intimidated. He just wouldn't let up. I felt trapped and panicky and didn't know how to end this torment. It never occurred to me to let him know I felt intimidated. Unfortunately, Corrections training at the time was antiquated and advised us to hide any emotions.

So I did the only thing I could think of: I agreed to withdraw the charge, providing he promised to get back on track. Greg's demeanour transformed *instantly*. Suddenly, he was my best friend and a loyal puppy-dog willing to play the game and be nice. I felt instantly gratified, sure that I'd done the right thing. Months later, after a dozen more breaches and further re-offending by Greg, I realized I had been amateurishly conned, and had let us both down by failing to confront his intimidation tactics by showing him how I was feeling.

By failing to set boundaries and not calling out his intimidating behaviour, I had condoned Greg's continued harmful patterns and

24 Name and other details changed for privacy

I had disrespected myself. He went back to prison, the taxpayer had to foot the bill, and I learned a painful lesson: because I was unwilling to admit that I felt intimidated, he was able to back me into a corner. Had I simply said something like, "Your behaviour is making me feel threatened right now," I would have essentially disarmed him without needing to forgo my own values (I would later use this approach very successfully on many occasions).

Flattery

In service-based jobs, there's a common insecurity many people share called the *Imposter Syndrome*: the worry that you're not really good enough for the role you are playing and that you will eventually be exposed as an 'imposter' who doesn't deserve to be there. When your job is simply to be who you are and get paid for it — i.e. almost any service position — there's a high probability of self-doubt, and self-doubt is fertile soil for being manipulated. It's all too easy to conflate getting something wrong at work with being wrong as a person. Anyone who is worried that their failures on the job reflect their inadequacies as a person can safely assume that they have the Imposter Syndrome.

If you're selling televisions, the television is the product, so even if it doesn't perform well you don't take it personally; whereas in being a Probation Officer, manager, chef, or entertainer, you *are* the product — you must provide the value yourself. When you're worried that your value is not good enough, you will desperately seek outside validation of your worth and thereby become easier to influence with praise and approval.

After three years or so in Corrections, I was so used to the manipulative phrase: "You're the best Probation Officer I've ever had," that it no longer affected me. It was a standard line that the guys probably taught each other when serving prison sentences together. But it took me quite some time to learn this lesson. Every time I had to enter the interview room with an offender, the "I'm not good enough" radio station played loudly in my head, asking me just who the hell I thought I was, telling other people how to live

their lives. Probation Officers are expected to rehabilitate criminal offenders, an extremely challenging task that I often worried I was incapable of doing. When I was in this state of mind, I was primed to succumb to flattery since I was desperate for some form of confirmation that I was not an imposter.

Sometimes, the offenders were being genuine when they said I was the best they ever had. As is often the case with flattery: occasionally truthful compliments make it ten times harder to recognise the manipulative ones. When more sophisticated offenders started working with me, they immediately clocked a weakness that they could exploit: I was needy for validation. They knew instinctively that if they could make me feel like I was doing a good job, like I was *special*, I would become lenient and positively-biased toward them. And I did, at first.

Eventually, after dozens of offenders manipulated me into believing that I was 'getting through' to them when no one else could and then subsequently were found to be re-offending like crazy, I realised that I was being conned with flattery. Keeping my Imposter Syndrome a secret prevented me from admitting when I didn't know what I was doing. Later on, when I became OK with not being an expert in everything, offenders were unable to pressure me or rush me into lenient decisions that I later regretted.

I discovered that remaining sceptical and confronting them by asking them *to prove themselves* was the most powerful response to compliments. For example, if they thanked me for being supportive, I'd respond with, "If you want to thank me, prove that you're on a better path." I learned that, in general, most compliments are some form of a flattery, and genuine recognition and feedback is rare. People aren't always trying to manipulate you when they give you compliments, but it's important nonetheless to build your own self-worth measurement system, so that your confidence is never *dependent* on compliments.

Invalidation

Sometimes also known as 'guilt-tripping', clever manipulators know how to use invalidation alongside flattery (validation) for the most

powerful effect: The Lord giveth and He taketh away — manipulators can become God for someone who is unwilling to confront invalidation. Offenders who would tell me that I was the best Probation Officer ever would often also be the first to withdraw such praise and question my competence whenever I did something they didn't like, or even entirely at random just to keep me off-balance. I would sometimes become dependent on their feedback to establish how good I was as a Probation Officer, or even as a person.

Common examples of everyday invalidation include: when someone asks to speak to your manager; questions your understanding of something you're supposed to be the expert in; brings up previous mistakes you've made. It's an attempt to undermine your competence and your belief in yourself. You'll be less decisive if you can't trust yourself, and therefore more open to suggestion and coercion. Abusive partners and families specialise in guilt-tripping, and it's my belief that this is the most powerful form of manipulation because it sticks the knife into a person's weakest spot. There's nothing more shameful than believing something awful about yourself and then hearing someone else confirm that they see it too. When you think they're simply confirming something that's true, you won't even consider confronting it.

A common form of invalidation is the *gaslighting* technique, which is when you subtly influence someone into doubting their own version of reality (i.e. make them think they're crazy). This is often done with small but frequent jabs at you over a long period of time. I had one particular guy always doing this to me. I would reprimand him for coming in late, and he would react with a baffled smile and insist I told him to come at the time he did. He constantly questioned my memory of events, and would emphasize every small mistake I made, be it a typo on a form or a slightly inaccurate recollection of minor details. It took me a long time to realize that on the days he was due to come in I'd start to experience anxiety, and the not good enough story would blare through my brain.

I needed help to see this one. It wasn't until I received formal manipulation training that I saw this for what it was. It wasn't just him; many of the more sophisticated criminals preferred this style of attack. They argued over details, constantly implied that I'd made mistakes, alluded to my weaknesses, and asked to speak

to my supervisors whenever they couldn't change my mind. Once I cottoned on to the fact that this was a deliberate ploy, I was able to call it out and confront them. I started to say things like: "I now feel unsure of the facts," but whereas before I would give them the benefit of the doubt, now I would either prove them wrong by bringing in an unbiased third party to mediate, or simply ignore their complaint (most details don't matter to the main point anyway). Ignoring their manipulation became the most important confrontational strategy, because by even acknowledging their claims I was allowing myself to be distracted.

Note: Many and more of the techniques in this chapter are used by narcissists: people with Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Antisocial Personality Disorder, and those who score highly for psychopathy. However, in my opinion and experience, they prefer invalidation over most other methods, and are particularly fond of gaslighting. Narcissists are often compulsive and extremely accomplished liars, and enjoy bending reality through a convincing combination of lies and truth, until you have no idea what is real anymore. If you've ever been the target of a true narcissist, you'll notice that you often doubt your own sanity or perception, feel like their version of the truth is more accurate than yours, and find that other people cannot see the manipulator for who they truly are (they make you look crazy while everything thinks they're a great person). You must trust yourself — if someone keeps causing you to doubt who you are or what is real, assume they're manipulating you deliberately, and react accordingly.

Distraction

Essentially, all manipulation is a form of distraction that takes you away from the truth, but sometimes distraction itself is the tactic. It's like a pickpocket touching your shoulder so you can't feel the wallet sliding out of your jeans. It's about using captivating words, interesting stories, and emotional outbursts to distract you from the original purpose you came into the conversation with. The best manipulators know that this technique by itself is probably the most effective for avoiding a confrontation because it's the hardest

to see taking place. When done well, it's like a magic trick: a mental sleight-of-hand. You can never be sure that it really happened, so you'll feel reluctant to confront it.

For a number of years, I worked almost exclusively with rehabilitating higher-risk criminals, and monitored child sex offenders for a number of years. These were the most manipulative group of people I'd ever encountered — worse than a herd of car salespeople, real estate agents, and multi-level marketing gurus combined. When a man has trained himself to get inside the heads of an entire family to manoeuvre his way toward molesting their child, and then to convince the child to remain silent, you're dealing with a psychological mastermind. There is no point in trying to out-manipulate them, they're just too good. And their particular specialty is to move about unseen through the use of clever distractions.

At first, they were definitely too smart for me. One particular guy, John[25], presented himself as a lovely grandpa: the kind of guy you trust instinctively just by looking at him. He always brought with him a warm smile, deferred his eyes during the handshake to show respect, and never forgot to inquire into your health and wellbeing. Just being around him made you feel good about yourself. Good enough that you'd struggle to believe he'd kept his own niece as a sex slave for over nineteen years, chained up in a drawer and abused beyond belief on a daily basis. This monster had me totally conned.

John's trump card was the language barrier. He was Chinese and his English was poor (or so I believed). Whenever it came time for us to discuss the nitty-gritty of his offending — a gruesome but necessary part of his rehabilitation — his language skills would fail him. This barrier, combined with my own repulsion to discussing such horrible details and my growing affection for him that he'd been discretely cultivating, made it emotionally impossible for me to continue. And if I stuck to my guns and said, "Look mate, we're having this conversation," all of a sudden his daughter was in hospital, or his kidneys were failing, or his welfare cheque was missing, and so on and so forth. There was a constant deflection away from discussing these key details.

25 Name and some details changed for privacy

I later learned to call this out through confrontation. I had to learn because he reoffended on my watch, and his latest victim haunts my dreams to this day. Because I failed to have a conversation with him about his offending, we never addressed or managed his risk factors accurately. That said, I've forgiven myself somewhat because I've since learned that he was diagnosed as an almost 'pure' psychopath with a penchant for sadism, therefore immune to any form of treatment. When he was released on bail, I brought in an interpreter. Every time John would start pretending that he did not understand what I was saying, I would ask the interpreter to translate. Also, whenever he brought up a distracting issue, I would say, "That's distracting me from the purpose of today's session, so we'll come back to it later." After a few sessions of my relentless persistence in returning to the point, he gave in and started cooperating.

You'll know someone who uses distraction frequently (though perhaps not to cause so much harm as John). It's as if they always have a fire that needs to be put out, so other issues you wish to confront them on have to keep being delayed. They somehow make you feel sorry for them, and provoke an awkward guilt through the hidden accusation that you are adding more pain to their lives with your harsh honesty. They can change topic mid-sentence, throwing off your train of thought and making you forget what you were going to say. Sometimes they don't mean to do it — oversharers and people-pleasers have a subconscious compulsion to distract others from painful emotions or conflict of any kind. Regardless of who's doing it or why, call it out by persistently returning to the main point you wish to discuss, as many times as you need to.

In the end, confrontation protects you from manipulation because there are no secrets left to be leveraged against you. You don't need to become a master of human psychology and anti-manipulation techniques. You just need to be shameless about how others are making you feel. If you're open, honest and humble, even when you feel unsure if you're justified in feeling the way you do, any potential for manipulation gets flushed down the toilet. Don't even bother with counter-manipulation tactics — you'd probably lose that fight anyway. Just call it out, set boundaries even when you're uncertain, and trust that relentless honesty will protect you.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Confrontations prevent conflict by giving people understanding of how to work with you effectively.
- Confrontation prevents manipulation by calling it out, neutralizing it, and protecting you from being moved.
- There are four main categories of manipulation: intimidation, flattery (validation), invalidation (guilt-tripping and gaslighting), and distraction. Deal with all of them by honestly voicing any uncomfortable feelings or thoughts you have when talking with someone.

KEY ACTIONS

- Identify how you've been manipulated recently and note what confrontation would prevent it from happening again. If it's appropriate, have that confrontation today. Just call out how their behaviour makes you feel (they don't necessarily have to change).

Barriers to Confronting Honestly

"Reject your sense of injury and the injury itself disappears."

Marcus Aurelius

Barriers to Confrontation #1: Fear of Abandonment

You'll know that your fear of abandonment is an issue when you frequently try to avoid confrontation, and aim to make people feel happy or calm as often as possible (e.g. trying to make someone 'calm down' when they are angry). You specifically avoid confrontations that you fear might destroy the relationship. You're unwilling to stand up for yourself if it means that you might lose people who are important to you. In other words: you're a normal human being.

We'll start with this one because it's the one that affects most of my coaching clients. As mentioned earlier, many of us view confrontation as evidence that someone has formed a negative view of us and therefore dislikes us. Because they dislike us, it's natural to assume that they want to abandon us and tell everyone else to ditch us too, right? And not just this one person: it feels like your reputation is at stake every time things get ugly. Eternal loneliness seems to lurk behind every potential argument.

Do you imagine your reputation being tarnished by confrontation? Many of my clients describe how they create fictional simulations in their heads about someone going around behind their backs and somehow manipulating others into hating them. While we can usually accept one person disliking us (as long as we aren't attracted to them or see them as a resource of some kind), the idea of them

spreading this dislike to others is what truly fills us with dread. We're scared of their power to ruin our other connections. This is why many of us only feel safe to truly be ourselves when we travel to another country.

This fear originates from the day you're born. Evolutionary theory postulates that humans developed such big brains — and therefore heads that are too big to pass through the birth canal — that they needed to be born earlier than usual for a mammal, making us more vulnerable[26]. Humans are weak and useless for many years after we're born, so we're reliant on care and attention when we're younger, and we know it instinctively.

It makes sense to have an in-built concern about abandonment as a baby, doesn't it? We cry when we're left alone and this brings the nearby adults running to our protection. You'll see babies constantly searching for proof that there are other humans nearby, looking up every few seconds from whatever task they're engaged with in order to check that adults are still around. At some point in your life, worrying about abandonment was not only helpful, it was necessary for survival.[27]

The trouble is that some of us don't grow out of this. Something traumatic interferes with the development process. Maybe it's being neglected or abused by your caregivers. Maybe it's being bullied and ostracized by your classmates. Maybe it's being confusingly coddled by a parent's emotional neediness (known as enmeshment). Maybe it's having some affliction that makes social attachment difficult, like autism or social anxiety. Maybe it's cultural pressure to be in a relationship and have friends, and being shamed when others don't seem to like you. The common theme is the seemingly inseparable connection between being alone and suffering.

Confrontations, or at least the perception that there could be a confrontation, become a catalyst for this fear to emerge. You see someone becoming upset in your presence, and part of you

26 Barbara Fischer, Philipp Mitteroecker. *Covariation between human pelvis shape, stature, and head size alleviates the obstetric dilemma.* Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (2015)

27 Meyer, B., & Pilkonis, P. A. (2001). *Attachment style.* Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 38(4), 466–472.

suddenly starts to worry that this will end your relationship with them, or with others through them. You immediately go into the 'fix it' mode, which consists of trying to change the other person's mood and emotional state. Maybe you use flattery, distraction and other forms of manipulative pressure to make them feel happiness, calmness, or any other emotion you interpret as being safer for you. We do anything we can to prevent or stop confrontations.

To overcome this fear, you need to slowly acclimate yourself to the concept of *letting people dislike you*. Being willing to lose someone is incredibly difficult when you fear abandonment, but it *can* be learned, and you'll become desensitized over time. We will explore how to do this more in the following chapters. For now, try to remember a time when you confronted someone and yet they didn't abandon you later. And remember a time when someone abandoned you even though you never confronted them. Notice this counter-evidence to your beliefs that confrontation is *always* bad, and allow your brain to start separating confrontation from abandonment — they are two separate issues.

Barriers to Confrontation #2: Fearing For Your Physical Safety

You'll know that fearing for your physical safety is an issue when you frequently react to potential confrontation by backing down and trying to go unnoticed (e.g. staying quiet in the face of verbal abuse). Fear of violence makes us particularly avoidant of aggression and dominating personalities, which means that situations requiring confrontation leave you frozen up.

This one used to come up for me quite often, particularly in my teenage years. I went to a rough high school. Physical violence was prevalent, and I got punched in the head on a few occasions for no particular reason. The more aggressive kids would randomly yell out, "What?" and if you made the grievous error of looking at them, they would start a fight with you. I was walking on eggshells. I came to believe that confrontation and violence *always* went together.

I remember my first trip to New York City when I was about twenty-one years old. I was walking through Little Italy and came across two Italian chefs. They were screaming and gesticulating at each other with emotional aggression. I assumed violence was inevitable. I waited with baited breath for the fight to begin… but it never did. Time and again in New York, I witnessed people expressing anger at each other without it leading to violence, and I was surprised. It made me realize that while in Auckland, New Zealand, shouting almost always led to fists, people in other places were able to disagree without throwing hands.

Others I've spoken to, who also fear for their safety during confrontations, often reference having violent childhoods, and get transported back to memories of a parent/caregiver or school bully beating them without reason or mercy. If you consistently feel like confrontations will lead to physical violence, you may either have this upbringing and have never healed from it, or you have lived in an environment where this is a real threat (e.g. a gang territory). It's also quite possible to experience this fear if you grew up *too* sheltered from violence, and find all aggression to be shocking and frighteningly unfamiliar.

As we'll explore soon, one thing to keep in mind is that violence rarely comes from confrontations, but it can escalate from conflict. In my old job, I had to face angry, violent criminal offenders daily, and confront them with things they didn't want to hear. These were people who had assaulted police, their partners, and some had even committed murder. There was nothing about me being a Probation Officer that provided any protection. We weren't even taught self-defence, and often there was no compelling legal reason not to bash us. Plenty of times, I had to confront someone who was already facing a massive prison sentence and would not receive any more punishment if they gave me a good kicking. Yet not once, in seven years, did I get attacked physically. Thousands of confrontations, not a single ounce of violence.

Ironically, being afraid for your physical safety can *provoke* violence from aggressive people. I'm unsure if there are any empirical studies to back this up, but I've certainly had numerous violent criminals directly tell me that fear 'sets them off'. Like the way a dog can be provoked by smelling your fear, a violent offender can become

enraged by witnessing victim-like body-language. I spoke to several violent offenders about how they select their victims, and many of them described an instinctual attraction to people *who seemed unlikely to fight back.* There's something about you that attracts violence when you're afraid of it.

There's nothing wrong with being afraid of violence. I still am. This fear serves as a basic safety measure. Being *careless* about violence is probably far more dangerous than fearing it. However, you must understand that your fear of violence makes it more (not less!) likely to occur during a conflict — especially if the fear leads to a reluctance to confront. As we'll explore later, as you practice and experience more confrontations (remembering always that confrontations are different to conflicts), you'll find yourself less intimidated by the possibility of someone becoming angry.

Barriers to Confrontation #3: Fear of Losing Control

You'll know that you fear losing control when you frequently enter into confrontations aggressively or defensively, or if you regularly feel unable to allow someone else to have a view that you disagree with. You react to nearly all disagreements with a fight-or-flight response, regardless of the content. You refuse to listen to the 'enemy's' perspective, and feel compelled to win at all costs. When planning a confrontation, you're more focused on convincing the other person to change than you are on being truthful or respectful, and you don't bother to confront someone if you believe there's no chance of changing them — you'd call such a confrontation "pointless".

Conflicts only arise in situations where one or both parties are trying to *defeat* the other. It's highly unlikely to see someone become emotionally agitated when they are genuinely curious, compassionate, and eager to seek a resolution that suits everyone. Simply put, people only get upset when they are trying to win, rather than creating a win/win conclusion. ('Winning' can be also defined as not losing.)

You've probably been pressured your whole life to be *in control,* to not lose. Your parents and caregivers got upset when they thought they couldn't control you or when they perceived that you had lost control of yourself, like whenever you had a temper tantrum or got bad results on an exam. Authority figures, like parents and teachers, would have insisted that you plan for your future, avoid trouble, achieve highly (i.e. succeed), and make people like you. All these demands have something in common: they are implying that it's somehow possible to always be 'in control'.

I saw an example of this a few years ago that stuck with me. My wife and I were leaving dance training and saw another couple arguing outside. The man had his arms crossed and a dark frown on his face. The woman was yelling abusive comments and banging her purse on the bonnet of the car. Neither were backing down, listening attentively, or trying to find a reasonable solution. You could see it on their faces: they were both trying to win (or not lose). As they drove away, we could see them continuing to fight in the car, oblivious to each others' suffering. This couple were supposedly in love, and yet they were trying to defeat each other!

Essentially, a confrontation transitions into an emotionally abusive conflict when one or both parties succumbs to their need for control. When you enter into an argument with an attachment to winning, emotions are sure to flare up quickly (unless someone submits immediately). 'Winning' includes: getting your way, convincing the other person that you are right, making the other person as upset as you feel (revenge), embarrassing someone you perceive to be your enemy, causing someone to lose emotional control, proving that you're the most rational or intelligent person in the conversation, and distracting people from the painful truth about yourself. Do you notice yourself trying to achieve these things during a conflict, or others trying to beat you with these?

If you want confrontations to go well for you in the future, you must first let go of your need to control other people, particularly regarding how they perceive you. The frustration, disappointment, fear and rage you feel during a confrontation can only occur if you are concerned with losing control. Understand that convincing someone else that you are right is not really winning, because they will respond by resenting you and resisting your ideas in the

future, which will further aggravate your neediness for control. *Confrontations are not about control; they are about standing up for the truth.* It's OK if people don't agree with you or even misunderstand you. As long as you express your truth to the best of your ability, you've done your part. You've controlled yourself, and that's all that matters.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- You need to face up to (and reconsider) the reasons you feel resistant to confrontation.
- You're more likely to be abandoned if you're dishonest than if you're confrontational. Confrontations do not cause abandonment.
- Violence is more likely to happen if you try to avoid confrontation than if you calmly express yourself with respect for the other party.
- If you let go of your need to win an argument, you'll find it easier to stand up for yourself — their reaction is irrelevant to you being truthful. You don't need to beat them, you just need to control yourself.

KEY ACTIONS

- Identify which of these barriers has come up for you recently, think of specific events.
- Ask yourself, "How did I learn to become afraid of confrontation?"
- Write a list of confrontations you would have today if only you could remove these barriers.
- Try to initiate a confrontation you're afraid to have.

A Step-by-Step Guide to Powerful Confrontations

"Great leaders don't need to act tough. Their confidence and humility serve to underscore their toughness."

Simon Sinek

Forget "Choose Your Battles" — Fight Them All

There's a couple whom I admire for their confrontation skills. At first glance though, you might think that their relationship is in jeopardy. They constantly bicker over little things. The first time I was alone with the two of them at their house, I was shocked by how much shit they gave each other. No crime went unpunished, and no problem was too small to be commented on. From my perspective at the time, it seemed like they were over-critical and hypersensitive, constantly finding fault with each other.

Then, as I realised that they were one of the most loving and loyal couples I knew, I looked a little closer. I immediately noticed how each of them seemed to be completely unaffected by their partner's complaints. I observed that each time one of them confronted the other, it never seemed to come with a demand for the other person to change their behaviour. Their feelings and thoughts were just expressed and then they both quickly moved on. It became apparent to me that they had worked out some kind of agreement about being as honest as possible without taking things personally. Most importantly, it seemed to be working well for them.

I became fascinated by this. While other couples either faked a pleasant facade, or swung between adoration and screaming tantrums, these two had found a steady, healthy balance. They were not abusive, but they were certainly vocal about what aspects of each other's behaviour bothered them. I started to realize that they weren't actually bitching *at* each other, they were simply sharing how they felt. They were setting boundaries and reassuring each other. They were, in fact, *bonding*.

What we can learn from this couple is the benefit of confronting people *every single time* there is an opportunity to do it. You've probably been raised on the cliched "pick your battles" advice, where you are encouraged to select only a small handful of confrontations to have (usually those you are most likely to 'win') while backing down or ignoring all others (usually those you are likely to 'lose' or upset someone else). This advice is usually just an excuse for never having an uncomfortable confrontation at all, even when it matters the most.

I'd like to suggest that, for now, if you're someone who finds confrontations uncomfortable and difficult to manage, *you need a lot of practice*. Fight all available battles rather than just picking out the easy ones and ignoring the rest. Luckily, you'll probably be presented with opportunities to practice nearly every single day that you socialise with others. Unfortunately, many of you will immediately feel hit by a barrage of excuses in your head, the most prominent probably being: "But I don't know how to confront people without it going badly." In this chapter, I'd like to put that excuse to bed.

What follows is a communication tool that I learned and adapted in my work with criminal offenders, and it's designed to facilitate helpful confrontations with even the most aggressive or resistant people. Following this step-by-step process won't guarantee that it goes 'well' or that you 'win', but it will help you learn how to have healthy confrontations and to assert yourself honestly in any social situation.

The BEI(R)D Model

To effectively confront someone while reducing the likelihood or severity of their conflict-reaction, you must know how to be assertive and compassionate without aggression or submission. You must present your version of the truth as succinctly and clearly as possible, without sugar-coating or patronizing your audience, and then be prepared to accept and manage their reaction without backing down. The BEI(R)D model I'm about to share will help you with the confrontation part, and in upcoming chapters we'll explore how to manage their reaction.

Confrontations don't need to be complicated or lengthy. The shorter the better. Keep it as simple and clean as possible, while keeping in mind that it's also OK to stutter, stumble and fumble if you're feeling nervous. I had to initiate and practice *dozens* of different BEI(R)D-type confrontations before I stopped feeling overwhelmed with anxiety, and to this day my heartrate still increases whenever I have to confront someone whom I know will react in a difficult way. Think of this as your best attempt to confront, not as a perfectly articulated and academic argument. Always remember: *you don't need to win.* The BEI(R)D model is about confrontation, not about domination. As long as you're honest, your mission is successful.

For teaching the BEI(R)D model, I will refer to an example of a time I had to use this for a very delicate and uncomfortable confrontation. I was working with Anna[28], my administrative assistant — a young, friendly and attractive woman. Her colleagues had approached me complaining of her body odour. None of them were bold enough to talk to her about it, but I knew someone had to or it could get ugly. I liked this girl and knew she would be hugely embarrassed by this confrontation, so it took all the courage I could muster.

Thankfully, I had the BEI(R)D model to lean on, and this is how it went...

28 Name and details changed for privacy

Step 1: Preparation

To reduce the surprise factor and to allow someone to emotionally prepare for a confrontation, it's best not to throw it in their face unexpectedly. The worst confrontation is the one that shocks a person and puts them in a position of unexpected fearful reactions. If you believe that this confrontation could lead to a conflict, make sure that they see it coming well in advance, and create enough time and space to talk this through with you without interruption. Respect them enough not to confront them in front of others and put them on the spot, if possible. You wouldn't want that to be done to you, right?

Tell them that you would like to speak privately with them, and ask for ten minutes of their time. Give them a heads-up that something is bothering you and that you'd like to run it past them at the first convenient opportunity. You're letting them know that a confrontation is going to take place, but that this is also about *your reaction to something* and not about them personally (responsible honesty never blames someone else for the way you feel).

For my assistant Anna, I said something like this:

> *"Hey Anna, there's something I need to talk to you about. It's a little bit awkward so I'd prefer if we could discuss it privately. When can we get together for ten minutes to talk it through?"*

If someone refuses to speak with you, then you must contemplate what is under your control in this situation. Don't force yourself onto someone or otherwise coerce them into a discussion. If they don't want to talk, respect that, and find another way to move on. Had Anna refused to speak with me, I wouldn't have punished her. I would have simply informed her that there may be problems with her workmates if she didn't talk with me, and that it's up to her. In cases where your relationship simply cannot continue if they do not address this issue, you may need to take more drastic measures, which we'll explore later.

Step 2: B = Behaviour

To encourage someone not to take what you say personally, it's important that you specify the behaviour you wish to give feedback on, rather than attacking them as a whole person. This will go a long way toward them being more open to hearing you. If you're talking about a specific behaviour, rather than their entire personality, they will know that they can handle any behavioural changes needed (if they want to) and also will be unlikely to feel unfairly judged or labelled.

Once you're in a safe, private space, let them know that there's a behaviour or pattern of behaviours that you'd like to address. Make sure to point out that this is not about them as an entire person, it's just about you and your reaction to their specific behaviour. At this stage, you can keep it broad and general, because you'll go into specific examples and details in the next step. This step is mostly about ending any suspense.

It might be worth quickly eliminating any worries they have of future consequences too, i.e. let them know up front whether there are any punishments or reprimands coming. Just remember not to build up suspense or keep them guessing. Cut straight to the point so they know exactly where this is going and won't end up getting confused by wafty details.

> *"Anna, this is uncomfortable to say, but I've had one of your colleagues come forward anonymously about a personal issue with your hygiene. This is not something I have a problem with personally, and it won't cause you any job troubles, but I need to address it in case it leads to difficulties between you and others."*

Step 3: E = Examples and Evidence

As you start to assert yourself, their mind may already be going into defense-mode, even when you're following a non-aggressive model like BEI(R)D. So if you make a claim that is not backed up by evidence,

all their defensive mind will care about is countering your claim. If I were to say, "Anna, you're never clean," her mind will immediately obsess over examples of times she was clean, and she will feel unfairly attacked. Once she gets defensive, she'll stop listening to me completely and a conflict will quickly arise. No one wins.

You must instead try to give *recent, specific,* and *obvious* examples of the behaviour, so that there is no argument against it. Avoid words like *always* and *never* — ironically, these words are *always* exaggerations and *never* true. Stick to the facts, as specifically as you possibly can, and do not present unverified evidence or opinion as fact. Make sure you are specifying something that definitely happened and you both know it happened. The more recent, the better. You don't need to go into the long-term past unless it's absolutely necessary. Let sleeping dogs lie. If you didn't address it back when it happened, that's your problem, not theirs.

> *"Yesterday, when I went past your desk, I noticed you had strong body odour. It didn't bother me, but I've had someone come to me this week asking if I could talk to you about it."*

At this point, they are likely to start showing visible signs of being uncomfortable or defensive. They might get defensive, embarrassed, argumentative or confused, even if you're doing this 'right'. Keep plowing through, you should try to get through the whole model without backing down. You'll be done soon, and they can respond then. Don't let reactive body language deter you, and don't allow them to interrupt. You can always say, "I'll ask you to respond in a minute, please let me finish this."

Step 4: I = Impact

This is probably the most powerful part of the BEI(R)D model. The *impact* step is where you can help a compassionate person see that their behaviour may be harmful, or you can help a self-centred person see that they are not personally gaining from their behaviour. Often, I like to present both types of impact: how it affected me or others, and how I think it will affect them personally. I appeal to

both their empathy and their self-interest simultaneously, which is not only more effective but also more accurate.

You can let your emotions show (but don't put on a fake performance to convince them). You've already presented the facts, and now is the time to tap into how you've reacted emotionally to those facts. With that being said, less empathetic people will be unmoved by emotional impact, so it will be helpful for them to also see some reason-based impact — some more logical reasons to change their behaviour, e.g. loss of money. Be bold here, let them know what's happening without trying to water it down.

> *"I feel uncomfortable knowing that there might be unspoken issues between you and others simply because of hygiene* [impact on me]*. I spoke to some of the women in our team and they said they feel embarrassed talking to you about it* [impact on others]*. Mostly, I'd hate to think you're unaware of this and get weird reactions from people without knowing why* [impact on Anna]*."*

Notice in my language that at no point did I blame Anna for the way I feel. I simply told her that I and others have had a reaction. I could even go a step further, which I often do, and say something like: "It's not your fault that I got upset — that's for me to manage — but if you want to develop a good relationship with me, it will probably help you to know what I'm easily affected by." For this example, however, Anna was already clearly embarrassed and didn't need more than the basics (and I wasn't actually all that upset).

You don't need to flog a dead horse. If you can clearly see that they understand your issue, and are embarrassed or guilty or otherwise motivated to change, you don't need to keep hammering them with it. Your point has been made. Respect that they have the autonomy and intelligence to decide for themselves what to do with this feedback. At this point during the interaction, you may wish to stop and allow them to respond before you continue, particularly if you see them showing signs of emotional agitation.

If Anna didn't care about the impact on me or others, then I'm getting a warning sign that she might not be someone I want in my life, an issue that we'll cover more in upcoming chapters. But

during confrontations, I try not to take someone's *initial* reaction too seriously. It might be a few days before the shock of being confronted wears off and their more authentic reaction comes to the surface. Sometimes, you need to understand that while you were prepared for the confrontation, they weren't, and they'll need time to process it and catch up. Give them room to digest before judging their reaction. In simple terms: their first response doesn't count. Let it go.

Step 5: R = Relate

The original BEID model I learned did not include this step, I've added it myself. This step is where you relate to the behaviour you're complaining about with a confession of behaving in a similar way. You show them that you're no better than they are, so that they don't feel patronised or judged.

I've found that people are much more open to what I have to say if I'm non-judgmental. Also, if I'm forced to relate to someone's behaviour, it brings me down from my pedestal and reminds me that I'm also human, and no better than they are. It's a form of honesty about myself that keeps my ego in check. This step allows you to use confrontations in order to connect deeply with someone, as opposed to just telling them off and creating a distance between you. This non-judgmental approach creates an environment of respect which will de-escalate most conflict, switching off aggression and defensiveness because there's no threat from someone who clearly respects you.

Dig deep. Remind yourself of a *genuine* example of you doing something like this, too. Either the exact same behaviour, or something in the same category. You might never have engaged in their specific behaviour, but no doubt you've done something harmful that somewhat relates to this issue. We're all hypocrites. Face your dark side and relate to this person. It will make a world of difference. At this point of the process, they will probably be at their most defensive, so when you relate to them you'll show that this is not a competition or an attack, it's a connection.

> *"Look, this is uncomfortable for me to talk about because I've been through it. When I was a landscaper, my feet used to stink out my whole house but I couldn't smell it, until my brother pointed it out. I was pretty humiliated but I was glad someone told me. Now I wash my feet obsessively!"*

Step 6: D = Do

This step is optional because sometimes a confrontation is just about getting something off your chest. And if, during a confrontation, you come to realize that your reaction is based on your own insecurities and that actually the other person's behaviour does not qualify as harmful in any objective way, then you need to own that. If that's the case, at this stage you would say something like, "There's nothing I want you to change about yourself, this is my insecurity and I'm only saying this to make sure I'm honest with you. You just keep doing what you're doing, I'm working through it."

If, however, you believe the other person should change their behaviour, or at least be given the opportunity to consider a different way to act, you can give them guidance. I would usually pre-empt this with, "Do you mind if I make a suggestion about what you could do differently? It's OK to say no, of course." As we've discussed before: always ask permission before trying to change someone's behaviour.

> *"Can I make a suggestion?* [Wait for a yes] *Maybe just give yourself a quick spray with deodorant at lunchtime, especially on hot days, just in case."*

Anna was actually very easy to deal with. I don't think I'm being presumptuous when I say that young, professional women generally don't want to smell bad. I didn't need to say much for her to instantly decide how she would manage this. In fact, I didn't actually use the last step when I spoke to her; there was no need. What's interesting is that my bond with her was forged in steel after that day. She could trust me to be honest, even when

it embarrassed her, because I genuinely respected her and had her best interests at heart (I genuinely didn't care about her smell personally — I used to work in a warehouse with sweaty old men).

But many people are not as conscientious as Anna, or you might come across as judgmental or manipulative, or sometimes people simply will disagree with you (hey, sometimes you're wrong). And sometimes, even people who agree with you will get emotional, defensive, or even aggressive.

Managing the Inevitable Conflict

You can start to practice this entire BEI(R)D model on safe people, like your friends and favourite co-workers. The BEI(R)D model is also a powerful way to give *positive* feedback as well. Using this same process, you can identify someone's strengths and how they positively impact you or the larger world (you can skip the Relate and Do stages when it's praise). This is a great way to get used to implementing the BEI(R)D model without having the additional burden of anxiety around conflict. Once you're used to this structure, then you can apply it to more intimidating confrontations.

But, of course, by now you're already thinking: *"But what if they lose their shit?"*

No matter what models you use, there is absolutely no way to guarantee that you can be truthful and *never* provoke a conflict-reaction. The only way to avoid conflict is to be avoidant or fake, and even that's not guaranteed to protect you. Rather than waiting to feel certain that you can prevent conflict, it's much more effective and realistic to prepare yourself for dealing with it.

First and foremost, the most helpful way to prepare yourself for conflict is to remind yourself of this important and truthful perspective:

I have no obligation to respond to their reaction. I can stay silent or walk away if need be.

However, let's aim to first make a mess and then we'll clean it up together if we can, no matter how long it takes. You will make your best attempt to help them not to take it personally and invite them to behave in a more helpful way, but be prepared to unintentionally ignite their bonfire (insecurities) with your match (confrontation). If you can accept that they are *allowed* to be upset, and that it is not your responsibility to fix it, you'll find confrontations easier to initiate. Confrontations are allowed to be messy — the most helpful ones usually are, at first.

There is a big difference between caring for someone and trying to fix them. You can be there for them as they get upset without needing to be responsible for changing their mood. They are allowed to be upset. It won't kill them. *Crisis* is often required as a catalyst for growth, so if they're upset by your confrontation then you're possibly seeing the beginning of a positive change process. 'Fixing' that emotional reaction would only slow the change progress! I've found that the most effective response to their reaction is to resist your urge to fix it or avoid it, and instead encourage them to express it, with:

"How do you feel about me saying that?"

A bit clichéd, I know, but allowing someone to express their reaction in full, while assuming a non-judgmental curiosity about how they've been affected, will go a very long way indeed toward building the connection. You're setting a precedent here for the future: you're letting them know that no matter what you throw at them, they will be given the time, space and respect to respond accordingly. In the future, this will probably ensure that they are more open to hearing you out in full because they know that they will always get their turn to speak, too.

Let them rage if they need to rage (but never tolerate abuse). The key here is understanding that once you've expressed yourself, your job is already done. You don't need to convince them to change or help them to feel better; you're just being honest. Why don't you need to win? Partly because winning is a super needy objective that undermines confidence, but also because if someone refuses to respect you, isn't it better that you see that truth rather than to manipulate them into *pretending* to respect you? Know your enemies.

When you confront someone, it's an invitation to respect and connect with you. You're telling them, "This is what you need to know about me if we're going to take this connection further." If their response is an absolute refusal to acknowledge your pain, you must start asking yourself, "Do I need this person in my life?", which we'll discuss more in a later chapter.

For most people, their first reaction is not indicative of how they generally feel about you. It will just be their personal conflict that explodes as your confrontational match strikes their gasoline-soaked bonfire of insecurity. While their counter-arguments and response might seem rational, or even seem to be a personal attack against you, all they are really saying is, "I'm shocked and hurt right now!" They're allowed to feel that way.

If they start counter-attacking or defending themselves, you don't have to respond. Read that again. *You do not have to respond!* You can just be there and care for them without further participation in the conflict. They can rage, defend, threaten, argue, turn the tables and accuse you all they want, there is still no *obligation* for you to respond. You can literally remain silent and wait for them to get it out of their system. Your job is already done — further participation is totally optional and should only happen if it aligns with your values and benefits you both.

And when they start saying things like, "Well? Aren't you going to say something?" you can simply respond with, "I've said what I wanted to say. I want to now give you time to digest it and process your emotions before we go further. It seems like you're upset by what I've said, so now is not the time to have a rational debate. We can pick it up again when you're ready." Hold the line.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Prepare people for confrontations and respect their need for privacy.
- Focus on evidence and specific behaviour rather than judging them as an entire person.
- Talk about the impact it has on you, others, and them personally.
- Relate to their behaviour with examples of your own, so that they know you don't see yourself as better than them.
- Give them time to respond while simultaneously resisting your own sense of obligation to manage their response or 'fix' their emotions.
- As you speak, notice if their behaviour really does need to change or if it's just a case of you being insecure. Don't demand that they change if this is really more *your* problem (but still express your confrontation).
- Give them advice on how to be more respectful if they're open to it, but let go of changing them. Focus on being honest for your own self-worth.

KEY ACTIONS

- Practice the BEI(R)D model on someone today by giving them praise, or choose someone safe to practice a confrontation with.
- Once you've done that, try stepping up a level and use the model to give critical feedback to someone who might react with a bit of conflict.
- Practice practice practice!

PART 3:

Release

By now, you've learned how to be more honest and you have started to build the mindset that enables honesty to happen. But there's more: *learning how to manage the response*. Expressing yourself will get attention and provoke reactions. Learning how to manage these reactions, and more specifically, manage yourself during these reactions, will put the final touches on your ability to become a powerfully honest person of integrity.

Ruthlessness

"If someone tells me that I've hurt their feelings, I say, 'I'm still waiting to hear what your point is'. In this country I've been told, 'that's offensive', as if those two words constitute an argument or a comment. Not to me they don't. And I'm not running for anything, so I don't have to pretend to like people when I don't."

Christopher Hitchens

The Final Frontier of Honesty

By now, you should be able to identify the limits regarding your ability to be honest. There are things you feel you can say and things you feel that you can't. There are people you're more open with than others. In any given situation, you have a limit — a frontier — on how honest you're going to choose to be. Now, while dozens of excuses and justifications may run through your mind, and you may try to rationalise your decision to withhold certain truths, the real reason is that *you're scared of the consequences*. And that's the *only* reason you ever hold back on being completely honest. This is the first truth you must accept.

To be more specific: you're worried about how people will react. You're worried that they'll judge you, or react aggressively, or get upset and feel uncomfortable, or dislike you (or even like you more), or take vengeance on you. You're worried that their response will hurt you in some way. You might tell yourself that you want to protect them, but that's only partly true: you only protect them in order to protect yourself *from* them. To cross over this fear barrier — to express the truth while knowing that the reaction will be painful for you — is to engage in what we will now refer to as *ruthless honesty.*

Ruthlessness is the final frontier of being honest. If confrontations are the most uncomfortable form of honesty, then ruthlessness

is the most uncomfortable form of confrontations — the boldest of the bold. Ruthless honesty is speaking your mind about the most important truths without moderating them in order to protect anyone's feelings, including your own. Ruthlessness means deliberately and knowingly provoking conflict, hurting people's feelings, disappointing people who trust you, changing people's perspective of you into something more negative, and potentially destroying your 'good person' reputation. While on the outside it might appear that you're being ruthless with others, most of the time it's really *you* who will feel the most uncomfortable… at least, until you get used to it.

I've been slowly opening your mind to the idea that you aren't guaranteed a 'good' response to your honesty. I have been preparing you for the kind of courage you'll need to be ruthlessly honest — to elicit a really 'bad' response when there is no other way to be honest. This will require you to let go, once and for all, of your attachments to emotional comfort, being liked, having people approve of you and agree with you, and being seen as a 'nice' person. Yes, you can always try to be respectful and compassionate as well as honest, but sometimes there's just no way around people getting really upset.

Through upgrading my confrontations over time into the realm of ruthlessness, I've had to face my darkest fears and have my worst-case scenarios come true. I've made people cry. I've had people create nasty nicknames about me (e.g. at my old job, I was derogatively referred to as 'Golden Boy' for living with integrity). I once had an entire small-town community outraged and shouting at me. I've lost close friends, clients and colleagues. I've even been punched in the face. I've endured a lot of discomfort and pain from being ruthlessly honest.

And I'd do it all over again.

It's time to face those reactions you've been avoiding up until now. It's time to let some people hate you. It's time to see people cry. It's time to be judged and misunderstood, and have people talk shit about you behind your back and call you names. It's time to finally prioritise your integrity — your love and respect for yourself — as more important than other people's love and respect for you. It's time to find out what true *freedom* feels like, by removing the final

barriers and limits you have on your ability to speak your mind and shamelessly express your true self at *all* times.

The Inevitability of Hurt Feelings

There's a conflict between the desire to be honest with people and the desire to avoid 'causing' them pain (which would lead you to feel uncomfortable or for them to hurt you in revenge). Whenever you predict that your honesty will hurt people's feelings, you'll feel a strong urge to resort to the alternative options of avoidance or lying. In situations of this nature, it seems that there is no way to honestly express yourself. You'll feel *forced* into dishonesty.

As you become more honest, you're inevitably going to be hit with a moral dilemma. No matter how accurate you are, and no matter how much compassion you intertwine with your honesty, you'll eventually be faced with a situation where you must choose whether to hurt someone's feelings (whether you even have the ability to hurt other people's feelings is a claim that we'll explore and challenge later). Ruthless honesty will force you to face up to your fear of hurting others with the truth. Regardless of how patient, considerate and calm your honesty is, there are people out there who just won't be able to handle what you have to say. In the next few chapters, we're going to address other people's negative reactions to your expressions of truth.

A great example of this problem is when you dislike someone. It's incredibly rare for a person to be brave enough to honestly express dislike for someone directly to their face. The modern dating scene is fraught with dishonesty around this, leading to lots of half-hearted communication, false expectations, and 'ghosting'[29]. On one hand, we always know when we'd rather not spend time with someone, but on the other hand we feel powerless to express this, so we end up either avoiding them or pretending to tolerate them. Rationally, you know that *you* prefer people to be honest with you about how they feel, because then you won't be strung along on

29 'Ghosting' means to avoid someone or act aloof until they get the hint and give up on connecting with you.

false pretences, yet when the tables are turned and it's you who doesn't like them, you feel reluctant to 'hurt' them with this truth.

How are we to maintain our integrity if our value of honesty seems to conflict with compassion, caring and respect? Must we choose between kindness and authenticity? Is there a way to always be both compassionate and bluntly honest? Whenever I struggle with these kinds of dilemmas, I start by trying to find and observe the people for whom these situations aren't a problem at all. And in my search, I found something helpful, a perspective the most confident people share: *being ruthlessly honest is not the same as being cruel.* To help you understand how to be ruthlessly honest without breaching your other values, we need to define the difference between ruthlessness and cruelty.

Do I Have to be a Psychopath?

The word 'ruthless' will evoke in many of you other words such as: coldheartedness, selfishness, cruelty, and pain. We associate ruthlessness with violent criminals, psychopaths, and despots. We think there's an implication of causing harm to others for your own gain. Let's be clear here: this is *not* what I mean by ruthless honesty. Confident people are generally warm, loving, giving and empathetic, yet they are still able to give it to you straight.

As we'll explore throughout the next few chapters, ruthlessness is not about causing harm, it is in fact the opposite. When done right, ruthless honesty is the most helpful form of expression you can ever hope to put out there. Sure, it will almost always get an uncomfortable reaction at first, but the greatest changes come from crisis, and ruthless truth has a way of creating helpful crises for people who have strayed far away from their integrity. Ruthless honesty is often the wake-up call; the epiphany that people *need*.

While it's fair to say that being ruthlessly honest is *self-serving*, that's not the same as *selfish*. Being unmoderated in your truthfulness will relieve your shame, prevent manipulation, and give you a sense of bravery, freedom and self-respect, so you gain immensely from

doing it, but it also gives value to others. *Psychopathic* ruthlessness — harming people for your own gains without empathy or remorse — does not give anything to others. But our ruthlessness will not be psychopathic. We will still practice love and empathy. In fact, we will be even more loving than most people who are trying to be kind!

Think on these examples of ruthlessness (these are real): showing a misogynist client that his beliefs about women are the cause of all his suffering in relationships; telling my dance partner that her histrionic responses to competitions are taking the fun out of it for me and make me want to quit; warning my girlfriend that she must be straight with me and not play games or I'd break up with her; sharing with my parents that I suffered social anxiety because we moved around a lot when I was young.

These are all examples of ruthless honesty. In each of these cases, both the receiver and I felt huge emotional discomfort, and the confrontation often escalated into conflict during the interaction. But look at them once more and see how the *receivers* benefit. See how my client gets clarity on his next steps and may now find a loving relationship instead of enduring endless bitterness. See how my dance partner gets to avoid losing me and keep dancing. See how my girlfriend was able to improve her communication and build a loving relationship (she's now my wife). See how my parents were able to see the truth about their boy and understand him better.

For the rest of this book, we're going to explore this most courageous form of honesty, so that you can engage in similar confrontations and disclosures in order to improve the quality of your life, your self-worth, and your connections with others.

Learned Ruthlessness

Some people are 'ruthless' all the time as a defence mechanism. These are the kind of people that are often described by friends and colleagues as blunt, straight-shooting, judgmental, or mean. These people are ruthless regardless of context, and are often lacking in compassion, as they have learned to be (or are legitimately)

psychopathic as a means of controlling their situation. And sometimes, certain professions force people to develop the thick skin requisite for honest ruthlessness, like doctors, police, and CEOs.

We are going to take the wisdom from such people, discard the insecurities and flaws in their approach (e.g. trying to control the outcome), add compassion, and develop a hard form of honesty that benefits everyone. Learning how and when to be ruthless is all about developing three basic skills that we will discuss in the next chapter: *knowing when it's required, letting go of keeping people happy,* and *knowing how to weather the storm of negative reactions.*

Take a deep breath, and be prepared to face your final frontiers of honesty. From here on out, you'll be diving into a level of truthfulness that a huge majority of the human race is too scared to even consider trying.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Sometimes honesty means hurting people's feelings. This will be hard, but it's better for everyone involved in the long-run.
- Ruthless honesty actually serves other people by ensuring that they get the full truth and can therefore make intelligent decisions.
- Ruthlessness can be learned and applied with respect and compassion, to give you the strength to be honest at all times without exception.

KEY ACTIONS

- Make a list of all the recent times you backed out of being honest because you couldn't be ruthless and hurt someone's feelings.
- Next to each of these examples, predict how the other person will suffer in the future because you backed down (e.g. "I didn't tell Karen that her people-pleasing toward me was annoying — I was scared it would make her cry — and because she didn't get this feedback she'll probably continue to eat shit from her boss").

Dealing with The Big Reaction

"As long as you do it truthfully, music is not to be judged."

A.R. Rahmand

Riding Out The Storm

So, let's recap. Ruthless honesty means going all in, expressing yourself as powerfully and honestly and bravely as you're capable of, free from hesitation, unnecessary cautiousness, and people-pleasing. It means no holding back. It means saying *exactly* what's on your mind without sugar-coating or hiding anything in order to protect yourself. Nothing is done halfway. And so, with powerful expressions will come equally powerful reactions.

We must acknowledge the inevitable costs of this approach: the negative reactions some people will have to you being ruthless. Overall, you'll be more inclined to be ruthless if you feel confident in your ability to manage the inevitable 'damage' that this kind of bold expression can do. Whether it's disappointing people, closing doors to opportunities, causing uncomfortable feelings, or even ending relationships, there is often some kind of fall-out in reaction to someone being hit with raw truth. So how can you manage this, to feel better prepared and to just go for it and live with more integrity?

The great news is that you don't have to do much at all, actually. Managing all those predicted nightmare reactions requires very little work on your part, if you're willing to just *ride out the storm* — to hold strong to your honesty without backing down, and also to put no effort into trying to convince people to agree with you. For the most part, the painful reactions associated with ruthless honesty will resolve naturally over time, provided you don't feed them by

counter-reacting with defensiveness or apology. We'll explore this in much greater detail near the end of the book, but for now let's look at some common reactions your ruthlessness is likely to provoke.

"I'm Not Mad, I'm Just Disappointed"

Let's begin with the most obvious barrier: other people's disapproval. Potential disappointment, ridicule, hostility, and the withdrawal of love make ruthless honesty seem overwhelmingly 'risky', especially if you're starting from a position of having social anxiety. I live in a culture where drinking alcohol is considered normal, and I've quit drinking altogether. When I first boldly came out as a proud non-drinker, I was immediately hit with ridicule and disappointment from others, who felt I was somehow offending or insulting them with my ruthless refusal to recreationally consume a carcinogenic poison. I often feel a strong urge to either defend myself or give in and have a beer, just to get their approval back.

Most of the pressure you feel comes from within because you task yourself with the responsibility of managing their 'negative' reactions. What if I told you that you don't have to?! When's the last time you just *let* someone be disappointed in you, without trying to fix it? When people laugh at you, do you ever just wait patiently for them to run out of steam? When someone threatens to cut you off or hate you forever, how often do you just say, "It's your call buddy, do what you think is best," and then let them do that? *None of these are situations you need to fix.* Disapproval is not a problem to be solved. Yet, you will feel compelled to not only fix it but prevent it from even happening.

You'll be amazed at what happens when you just allow people to be upset with your truthful expressions, without trying to manipulate them into acceptance. This doesn't mean you must become a cold-hearted, compassionless psychopath. It simply means that you are allowing other people to deal with their reactions in their own way and in their own time. It's judgmental of you to intervene anyway — in doing so you are assuming that they are not capable of managing themselves. If you're expressing yourself or behaving

in a way that's truthful to you, good-fit connections will support you (eventually). Anyone who abandons you probably won't be missed. So you can just allow people to self-sort themselves into whichever category they belong.

I was once faced with a dilemma that forced me to confront my fear of disappointing people. I had agreed to a training session with my dance partner, which was of high importance to her, but I accidentally double-booked my time since my brother had arranged to take me to a comedy show that same night. Back in those people-pleasing days, it was rare for me to be in a situation where I couldn't find a way to please everyone, but this time I couldn't escape; it was one or the other, and whichever way I chose, one of them would be mighty pissed off.

In the end, I chose my brother because I figured that according to my values at the time, family came first. As predicted, my dance partner was emotionally devastated once I cancelled my training with her, particularly when I honestly told her that the reason for my decision was that she was a lower priority than my brother. When she expressed her bitter disappointment with my decision, the guilt washed through me in a wave of hot bile.

Yet, a few weeks after the event it was like it had never happened. My dance partner got over it *on her own* and decided to forgive me. I learned to put everything into my calendar more consistently. We all moved on. Nothing bad happened! My ruthless honesty got a 'bad' reaction initially, but time healed whatever wounds were inflicted, and in the end she was able to trust that I'd at least be honest... if not reliable.

This doesn't mean that nowadays I just plow through everyone and leave them devastated in the wake of my truth. I still practice respect, awareness, compassion and empathy, (e.g. I've learned to be careful about double-booking my time). But I've also come to realize that no matter what I choose or say, *someone* is going to disagree with me or be disappointed. Rather than trying to avoid or prevent this, I can just let it happen or even provoke it rather than waiting in trepidation. In the case of my dance partner, this experience may have actually served her positively, helping her realize that she is perhaps too easily affected by plans being

changed and needs to work on her own reactions to people's decisions and foibles if she wants to enjoy life more.

Embarrassment and Ridicule

Few emotions are as unpleasant as embarrassment. According to my coaching clients, the avoidance of embarrassment is one of the most common driving forces behind their dishonesty. The thought of people making fun of you for saying something they disapprove of is a terrifying one. It would be psychologically accurate to say that fear of embarrassment (representing a deeper fear of ostracism) was the catalyst for normal German men to commit inhumane atrocities in the name of the Nazi Party.[30] Do not underestimate your fear of embarrassment... it could turn you into a monster, or at the very least a chronic liar.

When I first started salsa dancing, a fear grew within me and slowly increased alongside my enjoyment of dance. At first, I didn't know why. Then I realized that because I enjoyed dancing, I wanted to go into it further. This meant joining a performance team and competing with my dance partner. What's wrong with that, you might ask? The problem is, if I went all in on dancing — ruthlessly pursuing my genuine passions — it was only a matter of time before my friends found out about my new dancing hobby.

To say that my friends are unsupportive of men dancing is an understatement. We were all raised in West Auckland, New Zealand; a macho, wannabe-staunch culture permeates the area like a suffocating fog. Anything less than violent masculinity is deemed homosexual, and therefore open to ridicule and punishment. Simply put, I was scared that my friends would think I'm gay and give me endless shit about it. This wasn't some irrational fear — not only had I seen them do this before, I'd been guilty of doing this to others myself. This was *undoubtedly* going to be their reaction.

There are a few points to consider when you're in a potentially embarrassing dilemma like this. Who are you worried will make fun

30 A conclusion I drew from reading *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and The Final Solution in Poland,* Christopher Browning (1992)

of you? Malicious ridicule, bullying, and abandonment are not the same thing as friendly teasing. When you think about the healthiest and most supportive people you want around you, as you move forward with this difficult quest, do you think that they will be the kind of people to ridicule you? How likely are they to adjust over time to the new, more honest you?

When my friends finally found out about the dancing, they were divided into three camps. There were those who immediately accepted and supported me without qualm (good-fit connections). There were those who gave me a tonne of shit and laughed in my face, but in a loving way, and would still give me encouragement and support for competitions (best friends). And then, there were those who sneered, maliciously mocked me or talked shit behind my back, actively trying to make me feel embarrassed (bad-fits).

One way to reframe embarrassment is to use it as *a qualification tool*. Namely, if you feel embarrassed, low, or stupid for speaking your mind in front of a certain person, then they are probably a bad fit for you, and they are secretly asking you to cut them out of your life. This is why we call it ruthless honesty — there must be no survivors when it comes to disrespect! Think about it: no loving, supportive person would try to make you feel ashamed of living with integrity.

What's great about being ruthlessly honest about your preferences and passions is that you will quickly distinguish your allies from those who are simply in the way. I remember one of my best friends was trying hard to hold back his teasing because he didn't want to ruin my passion for dancing. His struggle to remain respectful was a testament to how genuine our friendship was.

Cutting people out is easier said than done, I know, especially when it's people you are 'supposed to' love. Most of my clients report that their own families are the ones that will most likely give them shit. Families and long-term friends are tricky, because even if they're a bad-fit for you, you'll probably feel an unbreakable obligation to keep them in your life. You'll then feel that keeping them around requires behaving in a way they approve of, a belief that will undoubtedly push you toward dishonesty and not expressing anything too controversial, right?

It's in the moments like these that I recommend what I call *The Drift Method*. Rather than trying to keep people in your life, allow your ruthless honesty to either build or destroy your emotional connection with them. Over time, people who are supportive and encouraging will provoke pleasurable emotional reactions in you, so you'll naturally put effort into spending time with them. On the other hand, when it comes to people with whom you feel anxious or guilty because they shame you for your honesty, allow yourself to reduce your effort toward that relationship. If they want contact with you then they must work for it, which means changing their behaviour in a way that you feel meets your basic criteria of respect and acceptance. This is a great approach for family: let them miss you enough to force them into reconsidering their ways.

The best friends who mocked me for dancing also stayed in my life and came to accept that dancing was part of it. Over time, as they saw me wow their girlfriends at weddings and so forth, they would begrudgingly retract their wisecracks. Others, who ostracised me, I don't miss! I can't even clearly remember who they are. Being ruthlessly honest about yourself through sharing your true desires, passions and preferences will filter your social circle in a way that suits you best. Hey, if someone is already nasty and judgmental, wouldn't you rather have it out in the open? Use honesty to provoke reactions that reveal their true colours.

Uncomfortable Scenes

Being honest with one person in private is hard enough, but what about instances when there's an audience, or when you know it will lead to something bigger, involving more people? There's a sense of powerlessness that increases with the quantity of people. I think this is why people fear public speaking. One person's reaction is manageable, but an entire audience? Impossible. Uncomfortable scenes don't always happen right away, either. Sometimes, you know that being honest with this one person will eventually turn into a bigger scene, like sharing a secret with a gossipy person, or venting on social media about something you wouldn't say in person.

When considering whether you can handle being ruthlessly honest, your brain will play out a scenario, usually exaggerating and turning your honesty into a nightmarish future involving all kinds of catastrophes, all being emotionally uncomfortable. This type of extreme prediction comes with a feeling that goes by the name of *awkwardness*. This is the word we use in order to describe that awful, crawling feeling that overcomes you when it seems like you are the 'weird' one, like you're ruining the vibe or are for some other reason disliked by a majority of people in the group. It's that urge to run away and hide, to turn back the clock to avoid having ever been there. It's also a test: can you keep being honest while feeling awkward? This may well be the bravest form of honesty you'll ever engage in.

Your ability to feel and face awkwardness without running away will determine your freedom, socially speaking. Awkwardness acts as an emotional warning bell, and most people respond to it by backing down or hiding. Ruthlessly honest people, however, move *into* it. Courageous people of integrity know that they must sometimes wade through awkwardness to get to the other side. You must get even *more* uncomfortable before things can get better. Unfortunately, most people stop at the peak of awkwardness, so the situation is remembered as ending there. If they'd just found the balls to ruthlessly keep going, they might have found resolution on the other side.

It will get worse before it gets better. You must start to frame awkwardness as being the *middle* of a confrontation. It's not the end unless you run away too early. If you say something that doesn't go down well with an individual or a group, that doesn't mean you should stop. No, instead you need to call out the elephant in the room: the awkwardness itself. You'll have heard confident people say it before. There's an uncomfortable silence and then one lad will pipe up: "Well, this is awkward." This is usually followed by some shaky yet relieved laughter.

Ruthless honesty means not only provoking an uncomfortable reaction but also talking about that reaction. Calling out the elephant in the room that you just created is usually the most honest thing you can say in such a moment (it's the most obvious truth that you've noticed), and it's also the beginning of the resolution. First,

the awkward scene must be acknowledged, because everyone is thinking about it anyway (and if they aren't, but you think they are, this will at least be clarified). With that out of the way, the reason for the awkwardness can now be ruthlessly addressed.

Just keep going until you break through or everyone leaves.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- People can disapprove of you and be disappointed in you for speaking with integrity, but this is not a situation you need to fix. Just let them feel the way they feel.
- If someone tries to shame you for having the courage to show who you really are, then allow them to drift out of your life by spending time alone or prioritising people who encourage you.
- Call out any awkwardness. Dive into it, don't run away from it.

KEY ACTIONS

- Be ruthlessly honest with someone to test if they're a good fit for you.

Knowing When to Use It

"Everything will line up perfectly when knowing and living the truth becomes more important than looking good."

Alan Cohen

A Commitment to Integrity

Ultimately, for you to have integrity, you'll have to decide for yourself when to use ruthlessness. It starts with a commitment to your values: a greater commitment than any you've made before. If you've been reading this book and decided that you do, indeed, want to live an honest life, then I'd like to challenge you to take it to *the next level*. Ruthless honesty, or should we say *extremely bold integrity*, means committing to truthfulness no matter the cost. While all risks are, of course, totally imagined and therefore fictional, sometimes you'll just know it's gonna go 'badly'. Ruthless honesty starts with a promise to yourself that you'll let bad reactions happen when necessary, so that you can maintain your integrity by always being honest.

Any diversion away from full honesty is a loss of integrity, whether it's moderating the truth to make it easier to swallow or staying silent while an obvious truth screams inside your mind. Ruthless honesty is the only thing that will save your soul. But of course, this is much easier said than done when it comes to the crunch. Confrontations, public humiliation, the loss of your job or relationships, and all manner of potential negative consequences surge through our minds whenever we realize that ruthless honesty is the only truly honest option. Fear grips us, panic sets in, and our mind starts to create a persuasive story about why it's OK to not have integrity right now.

In this chapter, I'll define three clear moments when ruthlessness is required. And in the next chapter, we'll look at how to come to terms with the fallout — to be prepared for it and accepting when it happens.

When You've Already Tried Being Nice

If you've already tried to be compassionate, forgiving and accepting but the person continues to engage in harmful behaviour, it's time for a type of ruthless honesty commonly known as 'tough love'. This is where you need to face the truth about your so-called compassion and see it for what it really is: a cowardly avoidance of the emotional outburst they'll probably have when you slap them in the face with some honesty.

Even people who usually stay silent tend to blame and shame when they finally run out of patience and understanding: "You do this to yourself because you're too X and too Y and just a loser." This kind of outburst is controlling, judgmental, and it shows that you are failing to take responsibility for your own needy frustration. This is *not* what I mean by tough love. Tough love should be both accurately honest and helpful. It's not outrage exactly, but there may be a healthy surge of anger behind it.

A great example is the person who keeps coming to you for relationship advice and yet never follows it, making the same pointlessly harmful mistakes over and over again. It drives you crazy, yet each time they come crawling back for another cry, you tell them that it's not their fault and that they are "just unlucky with partners" and that "there's more fish in the sea." The problem with this excessive use of compassion is that *you're enabling their pattern of self-sabotage.* From your viewpoint, you can clearly see that the common-denominator in their disastrous relationships is them, of course. But because you are afraid of them being offended by this fact, you instead enable them to avoid responsibility, simply through giving them further counsel and advice. And, consequently, they never learn.

The secret to accessing the courage needed to present hard-hitting truths is to allow the other person to find the answer themselves, using *responsibility-focused questions*. Responsibility-focused questions are different from judgmental statements, because you won't be the one assessing their behaviour, you'll be leading them

to make their own ruthlessly truthful assessments of themselves. It's ruthlessness combined with curiosity. You ask questions that force them to explore a new perspective, so that they can see the situation differently.

Here are some examples of ruthless yet helpful questions you might ask:

> *"What do* you *do in these situations that contribute to it happening?"*
>
> *"You seem to be repeating a pattern that harms you. What is that pattern?"*
>
> *"Why do you frequently come to me for advice and yet insist on doing the opposite afterwards?"*
>
> *"When you look at the parts of these situations that are under your control, what changes do you think you could be making?"*

This approach can be further enhanced and made even more truthful by adding your observations and assumptions as feedback, in a ruthlessly honest way. For example:

> *"I've noticed that we have the same conversation over and over again without change. I have no choice but to assume that you don't really want to solve this problem. But this seems bizarre to me, because you seem to be suffering. What do you think is going on here?"*
>
> *"I'm confused because you say you want one thing but act in a way that makes it impossible, and then you blame the outside world and refuse to take responsibility for your actions. I know that sounds harsh, but am I wrong? How do you feel about my observation?"*

Now, the toughest part is still to come. Before this moment, you've been the compassionate enabler, so they might be shocked at your 'transformation' into a hardass. Expect this shock: it's a normal reaction to surprising changes of character. You can explain your change of approach in order to help them understand what's happening, but do so without backing down or retreating back into

cowardly passive enabling of their poor behaviour. You can say something like this:

> *"I know that up until now I've been kind and supportive, but it's getting to the point where I'm forced to watch you repeat harmful behaviour. If this was the other way around, I'd want you to slap me in the face. I'm genuinely at the point now where I have to choose between being brutally honest with you or avoiding you out of guilt, so I'm choosing honesty."*

Following this, you then create a silent space for them to react, digest and respond. Don't use my exact words, obviously, or it won't be totally truthful. In your own way, try to explain to them *why* you're shifting to brutal honesty. Bear in mind, none of this is going to prevent them from having an emotional outburst. These are not manipulation tactics. This approach won't necessarily stop them from having a meltdown or from blaming you. The purpose is simply to allow you to regain your integrity after failing to be honest about how you feel (under the weak guise of 'compassion').

When 'Careful' Honesty Just Delays the Inevitable

Make a mess and then clean it up, not the other way around. If you can't be honest in a 'clean' way, then start with blunt rudeness and work from there[31]. You can develop and evolve it into a cleaner version as the interaction unfolds. If you feel compelled to carefully strategize how you will express your truth, you're already on your way towards lying. If being honest requires delicate wording, leaving room for vague interpretation, or linguistic escape-routes, it's probably time to call in an airstrike of ruthlessness. Brutal honesty is there to rescue you when you lack poetic, polite, convincing, or perfectly compassionate articulation in your delivery.

A common example of this is when someone has a bothersome behavioural pattern or trait, but you tolerate it for a long time

31 An idea inspired by *Radical Honesty: How to Transform Your Life by Telling The Truth,* Dr Brad Blanton (1994)

without speaking up because the other person is more sensitive about it than you are bothered by it. It's never 'bad enough' to tackle, so you feel justified in sweeping it under the rug. Of course, over time, this small grievance builds resentment and bitterness until the time when what once was a tiny problem becomes a big deal, overblown by the aggravation of repeated offences that have gone unaddressed.

Sure, sometimes you need to consider diplomacy and employ some social intelligence, but this is not the same thing as withholding the truth completely. By using powerful honesty principles, you should be able to express any truth in any company, as long as you're willing to make a mess and then clean it up. Throughout this book it may seem like I'm advocating for *reckless* honesty, where you just blurt out anything that's in your mind regardless of consequences, but that is not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that there are no consequences that should stop you from being honest, and if you're overthinking how to word something, it's time to just let it out as best as you can right now.

One way through this problem is to first express the difficulty that you're having while attempting to reveal the truth. That struggle is in itself the most obvious truth to be discussed, the main barrier in the way of a healthy confrontation. Let's say that I want to confront you about your drinking, but I'm concerned that you'll react aggressively. Rather than trying to think of a 'nice' way to bring it up, I can simply say something like, "I want to confront you about your drinking, but I'm scared that you'll get aggressive and maybe even violent, so I'm hesitant to bring it up." Then I go silent (remember the fifth principle of powerful honesty is reciprocation) and wait for you to first respond to my hesitancy.

In this way, you can see that there's always *something* honest you can say, even when you're too afraid to say the 'main' thing you want to express. Speaking about the barriers that you are facing in expressing yourself *is* a form of powerful honesty. It's bold, vulnerable and respectful. You're feeling them out, while not hiding anything. You're clearly showing that something is bothering you, without needing to go into it straight away, especially if doing so might be genuinely unsafe for you (e.g. confronting a boss who

tends to fire people who disagree with him). Rather than trying to find the perfect way to word something, share the fear that's driving you to find perfect words.

When the Only Alternative is to Compromise Your Integrity

Silence is always an option in any circumstance. There is no force in this universe that compels you to speak or act, only you can decide to do so. And, in the right context, silence or the choice not to act can be aligned with your values. If, for example, I found myself attracted to a weeping widow at her late-husband's funeral, I would feel no authenticity guilt in choosing to remain silent about my feelings until a later time. The values of compassion and respect command me into silence, and it would be an honest action for me to create a respectful space, something that is more important to me at that time than my fleeting feeling of attraction. (Later, we'll look closely at how giving yourself the freedom to remain silent will help you through difficult reactions.)

But there are times when silence or the absence of action is a compromise of your values: a distinct and undeniable breach of integrity that will leave you with regret and self-loathing. If I were to witness a friend who is about to put himself and his family in mortal danger by drink-driving, silence would be a grievous breach of my values. My values of courage, honesty, compassion, responsibility and assertiveness would all be *screaming* at me to do something. In such a situation, with my friend being inebriated, recalcitrant, and insisting that he's "fine to drive" while his wife and kids tentatively climb into the car, a softly-softly approach just won't do. Ruthless honesty might mean taking measures even more drastic than just harshly truthful words. In order to have integrity, I might have to forcefully take his keys off him and make sure he could not access them until the morning, even if it led to a violent altercation.

There is a psychological phenomenon called *the bystander effect*. Due to fears of embarrassment, or unwillingness to take

responsibility without first receiving clear instructions, the average individual watching a harmful event is unlikely to intervene if there are many people around. There have been dozens of great social experiments carried out to show this in action.

One such experiment placed a small female child (an actor) alone on the side of the street, crying[32]. While plenty of people walking by noticed her, almost no one stopped to see what was wrong. The men, in particular, were the most avoidant. The passersby appear to be worried about how people would react to witnessing them talking to an unattended female child. They preferred to let the child be frightened and alone, probably because they were more fearful that they'd be perceived by strangers as paedophiles. This is the bystander effect: people ignoring the call of their own compassion and courage for fear of being socially outcast… or even just slightly embarrassed.

People in that experiment probably felt regret and shame later. After the fear passed, imagine how many were haunted by their neglectful behaviour, and punished by thoughts like, "I should have done something." Sometimes, our cowardice during times where we need to be ruthless — not just with others but also with our own fears — can lead to major breaches of integrity and nights of remorse. Ruthlessness is not just about delivering hard truths, it's about living by your values *completely*, in spite of any certainty you feel that the outcome will be unpleasant. It's about stopping to check on the small girl because you know it's the right thing to do, with full acceptance that she might yell, "Rape!"

I have a moment in my past that haunts me. I was once walking through a shopping mall and heard someone screaming with outrage. I looked around and came across a bizarre scene. A young man of about eighteen years of age was desperately clinging to a pole and screaming his lungs out, while two middle-aged women pulled at his legs trying to make him let go. Somehow, I immediately understood what was happening: the young man was severely autistic and the women were his caregivers, and he was in the middle of a 'stimming' tantrum of some kind and had become uncontrollable. Yet, *I just watched*. These poor women were

32 As seen in this YouTube video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGqezUaj9jU

no match for his strength, and they struggled with embarrassment while people just stared and even laughed. Some loudly passed judgment. To this day, I wish I had helped them.

What haunts you? What did you avoid doing, even though it was the right thing to do, just because you were afraid of being embarrassed? What have you not said that bothers you to this day, even though it's in the past? Common examples include: not standing up against bullies; not asking people you find attractive out; not confronting parents or partners about destructive behaviours; not telling people you loved them before they died; not taking a risk and going for what you want as a career. These are all examples of breached values, where integrity and honesty are sacrificed for the easy way out. Ruthlessness means taking a leap and doing the right thing, even if it means getting judged and being disapproved of or disliked. Trust me: you might have a lot of discomfort in the moment, but you'll sleep much better at night. Being honest literally cured my insomnia.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- If you've already tried a soft approach and it hasn't worked, it's time to get colder and harder with your truth.
- If the truth is going to hurt their feelings no matter how you deliver it, then save them confusion and delay by ruthlessly delivering your truth in the most concise way.
- Ruthlessness will save you from regret — there is no situation that justifies a compromise of your values, so when ruthlessness is your only choice, choose brutally bold integrity — be ruthless with yourself and others.

KEY ACTIONS

- Ready? Identify one situation in your life right now that is clearly in need of some ruthless honesty and go on, be ruthless right now. Just do it. There is no better time than now.

Letting Go of Keeping People Happy

"According to your sympathy, you will take pleasure in your own happiness or in the happiness of other people; but is it always your own happiness you seek."

John Buchanan Robinson

The Truth Hurts... Doesn't It?

You may notice that being honest becomes immensely more difficult when someone else's immediate happiness appears to be at stake. Sometimes you'll notice that you are holding back and avoid being honest when you believe that another person will benefit emotionally from you hiding the truth. This assessment is usually based on your assumption that the truth will reduce their happiness and therefore you perceive honesty as being harmful in that moment. You may believe that feeling constantly happy is a 'good' thing, and this belief justifies any dishonesty that is needed to maintain or increase happiness.

But is happiness always a good thing? And does it justify lying?

One thing I learned from working with drug addicts is that staying happy was often the intention behind their compulsive substance abuse. Drugs are an instant gratification that delays having to deal with darker, more traumatic emotions. But if these dark feelings aren't dealt with, they compound until the person develops severe mental disorders and becomes ever more addicted to their drugs. Crime, too, is often an attempt to live in an easy way, to avoid the emotionally uncomfortable grind of a 'normal' life. Criminals' attempts to be happy might be satisfying in the short run, but always end up causing both them and their victims far more pain than pleasure in the long run.

To help criminals and drug addicts who are trapped in short-term happiness-seeking patterns, they must face up to the long-term consequences of their behaviour. This means having conversations that they don't like, triggering emotions that they don't want to feel. It means asking them how their loved ones are affected or how they'd feel if their children modelled this behaviour. It means exploring how their victims feel. It means showing them the truth about how harmful their actions have been. This certainly doesn't involve trying to make them happy! Often, the truth makes them feel embarrassed, guilty, sick with self-loathing, angry, depressed, lost, frustrated, resistant, remorseful, and sometimes even suicidal. But without these conversations, they end up even worse.

You hold back the truth because you think that removing someone's happiness temporarily is a bad thing. However, allowing someone to maintain a harmful pattern of behaviour or letting them cling to an inaccurate belief is setting them up for a far greater pain in the future. What starts as a small complaisant lie often compounds and escalates into a devastating false-reality. Relationships continued on pretence are heartbreaking to end, when a small rejection at the start would have been far less traumatic. Finding out that people are talking behind your back is much more painful than having critical feedback delivered to your face. Every time you withhold the truth to protect someone's short-term happiness, you are building a lie-world that could eventually destroy them. They don't need more happiness, they need more truth.

Who Owns Happiness?

Underneath the lie you tell yourself about how happiness is more important than truth, there is one even more harmful belief: that it's *your* responsibility to manage other people's emotions. You believe that you can, and should, control other people's happiness, yet you can probably also hear how ridiculous that sounds. When did you last challenge the reasoning behind your compulsion to make other people feel happy all the time? When did you last question your assumption that other peoples' emotions are somehow your job

to manage? When did you last test the belief that you can actually control other people's emotions?

Perhaps it's so ingrained in you that you didn't even think to question it, you simply believe in it with the same unconscious certainty with which you believe in gravity. Notice how *compelled* you feel to manage other peoples' emotions. When you see someone feeling frustrated or confused, notice your autopilot urge to solve the problem for them (often by using some form of dishonesty). When someone is sad, notice your urge to cheer them up or distract them. When someone is angry, notice your urge to calm them down. If you pay attention, you'll become aware of the frequent pressure sensations that seem to be pushing you to 'fix' and manage the emotions other people are feeling.

Why? Who anointed you as *The Master of Emotions*? Where did you get this compulsion from? Why can't other people be left alone to manage their own feelings? Who made you the boss?

Perhaps you defend your manipulation by claiming that it's a form of caring or compassion. Yet who decides what is *compassionate* and what is *controlling*? If you tend to intervene when people aren't feeling happy, why are you so sure that happiness is the only helpful emotion someone can experience? Since when is it 'wrong' to be stressed, frustrated, angry, sad or confused? Who taught you this? What if people need to experience certain emotions that *you're* not comfortable with?

Some of my coaching clients recall having to 'manage' their parents when they were children. Children often seem to respond to a chaotic home-life with people-pleasing behaviours — an innocently immature and simple coping strategy to relieve their pain and fear. Other clients reflect on the bullying, ostracism and loneliness they experienced in school, which they were only able to relieve by making others happy. They noticed that making people happy also made people like them more, so they came to the conclusion that making others happy was the goal of all interactions because it was a cure to their own loneliness.

This is what happened to me, too. Due to changing schools three times in my first eighteen months of education, I became shy and

struggled to make friends, until I discovered the powerful effect of being the class clown. From there, I developed into The Funny Kid — a superhero who could deliver happiness on cue and make people like him. However, as the years rolled by, I started to notice that people didn't really like *me*, they just enjoyed smiling and laughing. I was their *entertainment*. Their happiness was not a sign of love, and it didn't remove my loneliness. It was just an illusion of connection. As I grew older, I finally came to realise that making people happy was merely a manipulative tactic that I used to relieve my own loneliness, and yet even as a tactic it was ineffective. What once got me high slowly lost its potency. I even came to resent people for how easy they were to manipulate.

When you hide the truth in order to manage someone else's emotions, you have no idea what you might be depriving them of. Happiness certainly isn't an emotion that will motivate someone to change their harmful behaviour. For helpful changes in thinking, you need guilt, confusion, and even fear. For helpful changes in behaviour you need anxiety, frustration and curiosity. None of these states are happiness. It's uncomfortable emotions that make us go, "Fuck this!" and finally stop procrastinating on self-development and integrity. People who are happy all the time have no motivation to deal with their problems.

If the truth also makes them happy, congratulations! It's not like every time you're honest it will hurt people's feelings. But it's important to understand that ruthless honesty often provokes an initial reaction of discomfort, fear and resistance. If they're happy with critical feedback and brutal truth then that's a lucky break, because most of the time a new truth is painful to receive. It will be hard to be honest in a world that has been trained to be fragile. You might feel like you're the only one who's doing it. It hurts when your brain is forced to completely rewire itself to adjust to a new perspective or paradigm. But this is like the pain of working out at the gym — it's good for your health.

Fearless Truthfulness

I once had a coaching session with a woman named Francis[33] about her inability to create a good social circle. Throughout the call, she emphasized how "impossible" her living situation was for making friends (small town and isolated workplace). She kept referring to herself as "unlucky." After about thirty minutes of this, I interrupted and threw some ruthless truth at her: I said that I perceived her as a woman stuck in a "victim-mindset" who created her own suffering and fearfully avoided opportunities. We continued the session, and my feedback didn't seem to have much impact. However, the next day I received a massive email from her, describing in detail her disappointment and offense at being labelled as a victim. Francis called me unprofessional and unkind. I was starting to feel guilty as I read this email, until I got to the final line, which read:

P.S. You are right though.

I practice what is known as *fearless coaching*, a phrase I learned from my current coach Rich Litvin. Fearless coaching means being so truthful and bold with your clients that you risk making them hate you. It means never trying to make your clients happy. It sounds counterintuitive, I know, but it's not my job as a coach to make a client happy! It's my job to call out their bullshit, to point out how they sabotage and restrict their own enjoyment of life, and thereby unleash the power they already possess: the power to reduce their own suffering. They often dislike acknowledging these truths. Sure, they can feel motivated, inspired and happy *after* a coaching session is completed, but during the session there is often pain, guilt, confusion, awkwardness, resistance, frustration, and sometimes even hate.

Do you want to be a control freak? No? Well then stop trying to manipulate other people into experiencing happiness. Allow them to hear your truth and allow this to provoke reactions. Allow them to experience the full range of emotions. Sometimes the truth will seem to hurt them, but that does not mean it lessens

33 Name and details changed for privacy

their quality of life in the long term. As someone who has once almost overdosed on ecstasy (MDMA), I can tell you that too much happiness is dangerous, painful and unproductive. The truth can be hard to take, and sometimes there is such a thing as overdoing it (e.g. continuing to give harsh feedback after someone has asked you to stop), but overall the truth will never hurt someone as much as the lies that made it hard to hear feedback in the first place.

Face it: the only reason that you try to make other people feel happy is because happiness is the easiest emotion for *you* to deal with, and you mistakenly believe that if someone is happy around you that means that they also like you. If everyone around you is happy, you're happy, right? It's certainly a lot more comfortable than everyone around you being depressed, anxious, angry or confused. Look, it's OK to have these limiting beliefs, just be honest with yourself about it: you don't make others happy for *their* benefit, you do it to make *yourself* more comfortable.

Train yourself to start exploring the negative consequences of holding back your truth. Assume that if you won't say it now then you *never* will, and predict the consequences of that. If you don't admit you cheated now, imagine she finds out from someone else later. If you don't share your disgust with his behaviour now, imagine him continuing it for another five years. If you don't apply for that promotion now, imagine your career as if you'll never apply for it. Keep projecting the long-term consequences of your dishonesty as if you will never switch to honesty later, and this will challenge your assumption that both you and other people will benefit from your dishonesty.

Ask yourself, "Can I be OK with them feeling unhappy today if honesty will contribute to them becoming wiser, stronger and healthier in the long run?"

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Most truths that are held back today are just selfish cowardice — the avoidance of an uncomfortable conversation under the guise of keeping someone else happy.
- People are harmed by escalating lies more than they are by some negative feedback right now.

KEY ACTIONS

- Notice one long-term piece of dishonesty that's occurring in your life right now simply because you're trying to keep someone happy. Call them or take them out for a coffee right now, and reveal the truth.

Going Zero: How to Handle Bad Reactions

"To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering."

Friedrich Nietzsche

Handling the Reaction

Panic is the main barrier to overcoming your fear of being honest. Panic is an intense feeling of powerlessness. The reason we don't speak up when we need to, or take the boldly honest actions required by our integrity, is because we feel unable to 'handle' the potential negative reaction. We are terrified of a situation spiralling out of control. The thought of things getting out of control causes a sense of panic which shuts down our ability to speak the truth.

Perhaps you worry that another person will react so dramatically that you will freeze up in shock. Perhaps you're scared that the person will react violently, or punish you severely in some way, like your boss firing you in front of everyone. You may even worry that you will simply struggle to express yourself, embarrassing yourself in front of others and making them judge you as weak, stupid or 'emotional'. In these situations, your mind plays through imagined reactions like a series of horror movies, leading inevitably to a visceral, panicky sensation.

It would seem that the difference between someone who can be brutally honest, and someone who can't, boils down to one simple factor: *confidence in their ability to handle the reactions* (and other consequences). I used to believe that high self-confidence was a prerequisite for ruthless honesty. I figured that I must wait for courage to somehow happen to me, and then I could finally speak

my mind. Thankfully, in my early twenties, I was put into a situation that taught me the truth: first, I must speak up while afraid, and *then* I would become brave.

When I first started working for the Department of Corrections as a Probation Officer, I knew that I would now have to overcome my crippling, life-long fear of confrontations. The only way I could successfully do my job was to learn how to initiate and then navigate through emotional confrontations with aggressive and unpredictable criminal offenders. Just being in the job would force me into conflict, as many of the offenders liked to start shit for the sheer hell of it. I was thrown in the deep end, and there was no choice but to learn how to powerfully assert myself.

So I learned how to 'handle it'. I attended workshops and undertook courses on how to deliver critical feedback, how to 'roll with resistance' using motivational interviewing techniques, how to de-escalate people when they became enraged, and even how to respond to threats of violence or suicide. I tackled my sense of panicky powerlessness through developing a vast range of skills and competence, which increased my sense of confidence by covering all the possible responses. All of this training certainly helped, and allowed me to become an accomplished negotiator, confrontation manager, and deliverer of bad news. To this day, I still use these skills regularly to have helpful, boundary-setting confrontations with loved ones and strangers alike.

However...

All the training in the world still couldn't prepare me for the inevitable: being faced with someone who just couldn't be 'handled' and who provoked me into a panic that I couldn't control. No matter how skilled you become in handling bad reactions to your honesty, there will always and forever be that *one* person or situation that you just cannot handle — a person whom you cannot fix, control, negotiate or reason with, or influence in any positive way whatsoever; a storm that cannot be contained. To become completely confident with ruthless and shameless honesty, we must transcend our need for skills and control, because eventually you will encounter someone who is beyond influence. We must learn how to handle someone who cannot be handled. I'd like to introduce one such person now.

Hurricane Liam

For me, learning how to manage an unmanageable person was presented in the form of a single individual: Liam[34]. He was a paedophile and prolific nuisance offender who'd been under the supervision of my department for decades. He was an undiagnosable and untreatable panoply of mental disorder. We could only guess what he had going on in his head because he was far too emotionally explosive and violent to even coax into having a session with a psychologist. He was, without exaggeration, the single most difficult and unpredictable person I have ever interacted with in my entire life.

In a matter of seconds, without warning or reason, Liam could suddenly switch from smiling and being calm into having a full-blown rage attack, smashing chairs into walls and screaming death-threats at all and sundry, only to then inexplicably transition once again, just as quickly as he'd become enraged, into a weeping, blubbering mess. These wild mood-swings were a frequent occurrence. He'd been officially banned from every social-work support agency available, due to his compulsion to indiscriminately issue death-threats. We at Corrections were the only ones left to take care of him, simply because we had to manage him by law. As if that wasn't enough, he'd threatened so many of our staff that, as a manager, I was forced to work with him exclusively.

I threw all my coaching skills at him. I used my beautiful open questions, my thoughtful, compassionate and empathetic reflective statements, my drawn-out silences and meaningful body-language. I challenged carefully, sympathised lovingly, and listened attentively. None of it worked at all. Regardless of what I did, he responded by blatantly lying, throwing unexpected screaming fits, vandalism, promising to go home for his shotgun to "finish" me, accusing me of provoking him to commit suicide, writing rambling incoherent complaints to my managers, and — when none of that worked — he would punch himself repeatedly in the head until I was forced to call an ambulance.

34 Name and some details changed for privacy

I was at a loss. I'd worked with hundreds of psychologically damaged people but had never seen or encountered anyone as consistently intense as Liam. I consulted New Zealand's top criminal psychologists, behavioural experts, and forensic masterminds for guidance. Few of them could last more than ten minutes in a room with Liam, and eventually they'd scratch their heads in defeat and abandon me, departing with some form of throwaway condolences like, "Good luck, this guy's a fucking nightmare!"

It got to the point where I'd start to feel anxious from just seeing Liam's name on my calendar, or from hearing his strident voice bleating through the receptionist's window. He had the power to ruin my day by merely existing. He'd become a constant, walking, breathing, threatening, crying reminder that I couldn't 'handle' it. I quickly developed Imposter Syndrome, and started to doubt my abilities. A feeling overcame me whenever he started kicking off, something I later came to recognise as panic; a fluttery, short-of-breath, anxiety-ridden wave of powerless sensations that overcame me whenever I felt out of my depth from trying to control something or someone I couldn't.

But therein lies the secret...

Going "Zero"

One day, out of sheer exasperation and exhaustion, I decided to try the only thing I hadn't yet attempted with Liam: *doing nothing at all*. When he screamed at me, I left the room. When he phoned up to make threats, I hung up on him. When he cried and pleaded, I waited in passive silence for him to finish. I met every one of his outbursts with no counter-reaction whatsoever. I embodied a Zen-like state of unresponsiveness. I became *zero*.

I completely let go of all control. No more open questions, no de-escalation techniques, no calling the cops. I just surrendered and merely observed him any time his behaviour crossed the line. I allowed his abuse, threats and emotional outbursts to wash over me like a warm gust of wind, and I released myself from any

obligation to respond. My superiors didn't much approve of this approach, but since they couldn't suggest anything better and no one else would touch him, they had to let me give it a try.

At first, this new approach didn't help, but I wasn't worried because nothing had helped at all so far anyway, and it really couldn't get any worse. *I had nothing to lose*. At least this new approach required much less effort, so I decided to stick with it for a while. Then, a few weeks after implementing this new strategy, I noticed that a transformation was starting to occur. Slowly and subtly, Liam's outbursts reduced in both intensity and frequency. It was like responding to a child throwing a tantrum: the more I ignored him and waited patiently, the more uncertain and hesitant his reactions became. He began to gradually change into a more docile and amenable person, until eventually he was no worse than your usual run-of-the-mill mentally disordered offender.

An epiphany slowly dawned on me: *Liam required our reactions to fuel his outbursts.* Without reactions to fuel him, he became confused and unsure of himself, which deflated him like a balloon with a slow leak. I was intrigued, so I started testing this technique with other difficult offenders, and similar results happened every single time. It was like discovering a magic formula.

To properly put this *zero* strategy to the test, I allowed other staff members to once again interact with Liam. As soon as they reacted to his provocations with the supposedly reliable 'classic' techniques, he blew up again. Whenever he did this, I'd take over and do nothing for as long as it took for him to run out of steam. It worked like a charm. It even got to the point where he'd begin to cool down as soon as I was mentioned. He must have slowly become conditioned by the consistent pattern of me getting involved whenever he escalated, because his treatment of other staff improved as well. We even finally got him diagnosed by psychologists. Best of all, my anxiety and panic had disappeared completely. I started to actually look forward to testing my endurance and stamina against him.

After many further successful experiments with offenders, I started applying this 'going zero' idea in other areas of my life. I noticed that someone giving me shit for something truthful I posted on the internet required me to react to their provocations in order

for the situation to continue. If I ignored them completely, they just faded into memory, their nasty comments resigned to the eternal emptiness of internet purgatory. When my friend burst into tears and ran out of the room after I confronted her, I just sat on a chair and waited patiently. Ten minutes later she returned, and we continued the conversation to an amicable conclusion. *Doing nothing* became my secret weapon. There was no unmanageable emotional outburst that wouldn't be eventually resolved by just doing nothing and having patience. Time healed all. I had learned how to fall back into zero.

I didn't run away, but I wasn't freezing either. I was just calmly choosing to not respond. Going zero doesn't mean admitting defeat and giving up; it's more like taking punches without getting hurt. You allow the person to process their emotions in your presence, but you do not participate in that processing. You do nothing to *reduce* their reaction in any way and you don't throw any more gasoline on the fire, but neither do you leave. You simply stay and weather the storm, outlasting their tantrum with your patience. Think of it like Gandhi's passive resistance. You don't fight, you don't flee, and you don't freeze. You just wait.

By interacting with guys like Liam and dozens of other intractable or confrontational offenders, not to mention friends and colleagues as well, I've learned an important lesson about panic:

Your body only goes into freeze-panic mode when you try to control something that is uncontrollable. Panic is the brain's reaction to you pointlessly attempting to do the impossible.

It's no different from jumping off a cliff in an attempt to fly like a bird. Your brain is wired to prevent this type of stupidity, so when you go into a ruthless-truth situation expecting to control the outcomes and other peoples' behaviour — an impossible obligation — it makes total sense to panic. It's your brain telling you to avoid pointless suffering. But if you give yourself permission to go zero, true permission to have *no* control at all, you'll notice the panic dissipate.

Handle It by Not Handling It

Next time you're faced with a Liam-like situation, give yourself permission to not handle it. Rather than trying to figure out what to do in order to control the situation, figure out what doing nothing would look like (*after* you've expressed your initial truth, of course). Can you act in a way where you let go of all control and just wait for the storm to pass? That's the answer to panic. Ironically, it's also one of the most productive ways to manage a situation where someone has reacted strongly to you being truthful. Just create a silent space for them to expend their reactive energy until they are depleted back to zero. You'll find that it's a lot easier to talk to them after the initial eruption has subsided. But if you respond *during* their reaction, it will escalate. No matter how raging hot a fire may seem, without fuel, it will always burn out eventually, so don't add gasoline to it and you'll be fine.

You've been raised to believe that you *must*: respond to negative reactions; fill in awkward silences; look busy at work when you run out of shit to do; provide more information if someone looks at you skeptically; answer when someone asks you a question. But you don't have to! No matter how fucked up a situation gets, nothing can ever prevent you from staying in 'zero mode' for as long as you need to. Remember: this is not the same as running away or freezing, and it only applies to the situations in which *you've already expressed the ruthless truth*. Think of it as taking a brief time-out after the hard work of being honest.

Stay inert and unresponsive while merely observing, until you feel it's the right time to respond (i.e. they've calmed down and so have you). You can slowly gather your strength before your next expression or interaction. You can wait until any emotions that might hinder your decision-making pass (like confusion, stress, and embarrassment) or are replaced with more helpful sensations. Until that feeling of *power* comes back, you are under no obligation to participate beyond that first expression of truth. You've already upheld your integrity by speaking your mind, so nothing further is required. Once the truth is said, you don't need to hammer it home or defend it. Someone else's reaction is not your responsibility. They might imply that you should — *"Well?! Explain this! What do*

you have to say for yourself?" — but they can't reach inside you and make you respond.

While you'll often feel like an urgent response is necessary, like when someone articulately argues against your point in front of an audience, it's highly unlikely that any real long-term harm will come from you waiting for a bit. In most cases, there's no real deadline for responding. Unless someone's about to shoot you in the face or kidnap your child, you can probably take a breath and make time to collect yourself. Sure, your opponent might gloat about 'winning' in the face of your unresponsiveness, but the battle is not yet decided and winning doesn't matter to integrity anyway. You can always come back tomorrow, next week, or even years later with a response if you're so inclined. The fact of the matter is: you've already expressed your truth and no further elaboration is needed for you to maintain integrity. You've already won! Their response has nothing to do with your integrity.

Ruthless honesty is beautiful in tough situations, because by the time the other people respond you've already finished playing the game. They can argue, cry, bitch, moan, fire you, hate you, spread rumours, plead, beg, accuse and scream, but none of that takes back your original truthful expression, nor does it oblige you to participate any further. They're on their own unless you choose to participate further. You've already lived by your values of honesty, courage, responsibility and whatever else applies. Game over, pal!

Later, when you've been exposed to numerous situations in which you've practiced letting go of control, you'll find that panicking is no longer your first response. You'll learn to trust yourself to be an observer, cruising through the situations you can't handle with the power of 'going zero'. Then one day, eventually, you'll actually be able to handle them actively in the moment, should you choose to amuse yourself in such a way. Not being held back by the pressure to respond, you will start to develop rational skills in arguing and managing disapproval. But even this is just the icing on the cake. If you can express the original truth, your mission has already been completed. Getting good at arguing is just an optional hobby you can take up later if you feel like it.

Have a Pivot Plan

All of this becomes a lot easier if you are prepared to be unprepared: if you plan how to handle a situation that you can't handle. I call this 'pivoting', though it can also be described by other common phrases: having a back-up plan, Plan B, preparing for the worst-case scenario, etc. Over the years, I've trained myself to be nearly always unperturbed by unexpected and unmanageable reactions by being prepared for disaster and expecting things to go worse rather than better. At first, I learned this by doing conscious planning, and nowadays it's more of an instinctual reaction. It may appear to be pessimism, but it doesn't have a negative connotation: it feels the same as packing an umbrella for your picnic, in case of rain.

Let's say you have some bad news that you need to deliver. If you're like most people, you will try to imagine how you want the situation to unfold. You'll hope to somehow express the bad news so beautifully that the receiver will react with calm understanding, so you'll strategize how to make that desirable outcome happen. Panic comes next, of course, because your brain knows that the outcome is impossible to control.

My approach is the opposite: I imagine the most *nightmarish* outcome possible, beyond even the realms of probability, and then strategize for how I'll do 'nothing' and enter a state of zero to endure and survive that scenario. Like falling off a boat that leaves you alone in the ocean, I prepare myself to just lay back and float until I wash up on dry land. I give myself permission to not handle it, but also challenge myself to not back down. I encourage myself to endure the consequences for as long as needed, even if it means losing face. Just last weekend my wife and I had to confront her father, and before we arrived for the conversation I quietly gave myself permission to just sit and wait without speaking, until everyone was finished talking, even if it took *hours*.

Another recent example of this was a coaching client of mine who was starting to lose his mojo in our sessions, and was becoming sloppy and blasé about the homework assignments. I had to ruthlessly express the truth: I felt he was no longer a good fit for coaching, and I planned to challenge him to either step up or quit.

First, like everyone does, I tried to think of ways to avoid needing to have that conversation at all. Then, after realising that wasn't an option, I tried imagining safe, indirect methods, like sending it via email, or softening the challenge somehow. But I've been in this business for a long time, and I know when someone needs a kick up the arse. It couldn't be avoided. This was one of those times where ruthlessness was needed, so a confrontation was the only way to maintain my integrity.

I imagined the worse-case scenario. I imagined him screaming, cursing, and accusing me of nasty things. I imagined him quitting the coaching, demanding a refund, and then spreading his hatred over the internet with nasty reviews and recommendations to avoid me. While I knew this was extremely unlikely, I also knew that if I could survive *that* response I could handle *anything*. So I planned for it. Prior to the conversation, I gave myself permission to remain silent during his outbursts and to not 'fix' his reaction. I gave myself permission to end the call if it got nasty. I gave myself permission to ignore any lawsuits, online threats, bad-mouthing, or any other imagined nightmares until I felt good and ready to deal with it. I even gave myself permission to quit my business, go live with my parents, and hide away in shame until it was all over and he died of old age — you know, just in case.

Of course, the real scenario was *nothing* like that fictional catastrophe, as it almost never is. He smiled in response to my challenge, agreed that he had been slacking, and we redesigned our coaching to adjust to some new and distracting changes that had come up in his life (which were the real reason for his change in behaviour). It ended up being a positive and beneficial coaching conversation, as ruthlessly honest conversations so often are. But sometimes they aren't, and by just giving yourself permission to not handle it, without any obligation to control anything (after you've delivered your truth), you free yourself from a pointless task of controlling others. You respect yourself by being ruthlessly honest, and you respect the recipient by acknowledging that their reaction is their responsibility.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- No matter how skilled you are, there will always be someone who reacts badly to your truth. So rather than focusing on using negotiation skills, you can focus on learning how to manage your response to negative reactions.
- The most effective and simple response to a bad reaction is no response at all.
- 'Going zero' is a state of mind where you don't fight or flee, but it's not the same as freezing. Freezing is a panic reaction; 'going zero' is a conscious choice to calmly do nothing.
- Give yourself permission to *not* handle the other person's reaction, and plan carefully for a worst-case scenario survival option.

KEY ACTIONS

- The next time you feel that a conflict is coming up — confusion, defensiveness, offence, upset, stress, fear, anger etc. — just slow down, pause, and give yourself permission to do nothing except observing it silently for at least thirty seconds. Notice the 'obligation' to respond and simply observe it for a while until it goes away.

What If They Hate Me?

"If I have one technology tip of the day, it's this: No matter how good the video on YouTube is, don't read the comments, just don't, because it will make you hate all humans."

Matt Groening

Haters: Real vs Imagined

Let's address one of the most feared scenarios: *being hated.* Let's assume you've followed the steps. You've been as powerfully honest as you can and adhered to the truth as much as you're capable of. You've been as compassionate and caring for others as you can whilst still trying to maintain your integrity. And yet, even going 'zero' hasn't worked. In fact, despite all of your accuracy, people you're trying to confront, or simply connect with, have *still* reacted negatively to your honesty. They seem dedicated to maintaining an aggressive or defensive reaction to you. It's starting to look possible that they permanently dislike you, that is, hate you. What do you do now?

One thing to keep in mind, before you even consider responding to hatred, is that your *prediction* of people reacting negatively is not the same as someone *actually* reacting negatively. You can spend your entire day imagining bad reactions without even one event occurring in real life. Often, my coaching clients ask me about hypothetical situations: "But what if someone is mean to me? What if they get offended? What if they tell me to go fuck myself?" I often respond with two points: firstly, that hypothetical scenarios are just an imagined representation of your fear that you will not be able to 'handle' negative reactions (i.e. they are not realistic); and secondly, before you get all worried about people reacting to your honesty, it's important to understand that you will never learn how to deal with bad reactions until you first allow them to happen!

My first coach and mentor, Lynda Campbell, was my boss at Corrections when I first became a manager. Early on in our working relationship, she was listening to me bitch and complain about how my staff might react negatively to me delegating more tasks to them. She looked at me thoughtfully and said, "You're a catastrophizer. You blow things up in your mind to avoid having to do them. None of that stuff you're worried about has ever actually happened."

Damn... bullseye.

Confrontations are solved in conversation, not in imagination. As we move forward in this chapter, try to focus on *real scenarios*. Detach yourself from the hypotheticals that simply do not exist. Even if it has happened before, or has happened to other people, if it's not happening to you right now then it doesn't require a solution. You will not learn by simulating the experience of having someone react negatively to your honesty, you must experience it in the real world. For starters, it will never go exactly the way you predicted — you aren't as clairvoyant as you think you are — and secondly, it will almost always go better than your imagined worst-case scenario. I know for sure that you will survive upsetting people, but you won't know that until you let yourself do it. If you've been avoiding upsetting other people, then you're probably lacking integrity, so let's get our hands dirty!

Welcome the Concept of Polarization

When I first started writing publicly through my blog, I kept it safe. My posts were always about how to do things better. I took a lot of care not to offend, exclude, or agitate anyone. Despite my attempts to be helpful, most of the posts went ignored and generated very little interest. Why? Feedback from my tiny audience indicated that these posts had some value, and nobody was sending me any hate-mail or negative feedback. I couldn't understand it. I was trying so hard to be nice and helpful. This was some of my best material. Why wasn't it more popular?

Then I started to experiment: I started writing more opinionated material. I put aside my desire to help others and present a good image of myself, and instead started to focus more on honesty: exploring and expressing what I believed was true. The change in response was immediate. People started commenting on the posts and writing me emails. People started thanking me for my content, and started to share with me how they'd used my ideas to change their lives. The more opinionated I was, the larger the response. Amidst the praise and thanks was a small collection of responses that contained something I was unprepared for. Before long, I started to get my first taste of what we're all afraid of: disapproval, mockery, dislike, bullying, and even hatred.

People started to disagree with me, not just on the facts and opinions I was purporting but with *me* personally. They didn't like who I was. I had people demanding that I stop writing since they felt they'd wasted their time reading my material. I had people telling me that I didn't know what I was talking about and that I should just go back to whatever I was doing before. I even had people subtly threaten me with violence. I've been called just about every insulting name I've ever heard of, and many more that had me reaching for the urban dictionary. Just this week, I had one guy comparing me to a paedophile in terms of how harmful my views were to society. Ouch!

At first, this discouraged me from continuing. It hurt to see that my attempts to help the world were being met with scorn, abuse and outrage, even if it was from only a tiny minority of my audience. I had many moments of bitterness and regret. I felt hesitant about expressing myself honestly because it seemed to go unappreciated.

But then I started to notice that something else was happening as well, and that gave me hope: the more negative feedback I received, the more positive feedback came with it. Whenever someone was outraged or offended, there would be five other people who were immensely grateful. The more my work displeased some, the more it helped others. I was seeing the effects of polarizing honesty, being so truthful that you provoke strong emotional reactions: both positive and negative ones. When I tried my best to be as raw, open and honest as possible, I would almost always attract both hate and love. This lesson has stayed with me ever since, and

I found it to be applicable in different situations, including personal relationships.

Why Are We Scared of Being Disliked?

Throughout our lives we are encouraged to be as popular and acceptable as possible. This idea is *crazy*. The belief that being widely adored counts as evidence that you're living the right way or being a good person is completely irrational. Adolf Hitler was very popular, does that mean that he was a good person? We are utterly convinced that we need people to be pleased with us, and that we cannot know if we are good or bad until we receive approval. We perceive being disliked as a sign that we did something 'wrong'. But let me ask you this: do you think that you would have any neediness about being accepted by others if you achieved total acceptance of yourself? If you looked in the mirror every day and genuinely loved the person looking back at you, would you still give a fuck about what others thought of you?

We're told that being hated is a bad thing, yet we almost never look beyond this assumption or challenge it. We assume that because it 'feels bad' when someone doesn't like us, it must be a harmful thing. But what if the only reason it feels bad is because we think it's wrong to let this happen? This is one of those truly irrational beliefs that many people have.

What does it mean to be hated or disliked? For most people, it is about the emotional response someone has to you. To be liked means that the person has a pleasurable emotional response to you, while all uncomfortable responses are considered signs of some form of dislike or hatred. We become afraid of saying or doing anything that might move someone from being happy to a less positive emotional state. But why are we afraid of this?

Ultimately, we associate dislike with hatred, and hatred with pain. We assume that any unhappy reactions can and *will* escalate to a full-blown hatred. There are some of you who panic as soon as

someone simply disagrees with you, even if they're being calm. Why would anyone worry about disagreement or mild dislike? Because they've escalated it in their imagination. They see it as a slippery slope to hate. And we're all afraid of hatred for simple reasons: it's seen as the catalyst for bullying, ostracism, violence and murder. There's nothing irrational about being afraid of social ostracism or violence, but the problem is how often you'll confuse a relatively safe interaction with a threat of hatred, simply because someone isn't feeling totally happy with you right now. You won't necessarily have a clear thought like, "Oh no, now they're going to hate me," but you'll feel the fearful emotions as if it's happening.

Look at these questions and think about your answers:

> *Do you think that it's possible to be someone that every single person in the world will not hate or dislike, no matter their preferences?*
>
> *Do you think that it's impossible to enjoy life without everyone loving everything that you do?*
>
> *Do you think that everyone must approve of what you do for it to be counted as valuable?*
>
> *Were the greatest leaders and pioneers of progress in history loved by all and hated by none?*

Most people I ask clearly answer "no" for each of these questions, yet they still moderate themselves to please others on an almost daily basis. White lies, avoiding confrontation, not going for what you want, waiting to be asked before you do something, backing down in response to upsetting someone — these are all examples of how we hold back to avoid being disliked, and ultimately to prevent causing the highest level of disapproval: hatred. We engage, paradoxically, in frequent dishonesty in order to avoid making people unhappy, while simultaneously understanding that it's *impossible* to please everyone.

If no one strongly dislikes or hates you, you're probably holding back. You're not being powerful enough with your honesty. There will come a time, once you thicken your skin with experience, where you will welcome the haters. They will become a helpful reference

point for your integrity. If you try your best to be truthful and some people hate you for it, you're probably on the right track. If everyone seems agreeable and responds positively to your expressions, you are probably being vague, moderated, bland, or even outright fake.

You might have thought that this chapter was going to offer strategies on how to make people accept your views. I'm afraid that's not where we're going with this. For you to behave truthfully and in alignment with your values — to act with honest integrity — you're not going to be able to prevent the haters. Instead, I'd like you to focus on acceptance. Let's explore how to manage the only aspect of someone else's hatred that you can truly control: *your reaction to them.*

The Fallacy of Taking It Personally

A few years ago, I was sitting at a table in a nightclub with a group of friends. One of my friends got up to use the toilet, and within seconds a random woman tried to steal his chair. I quickly grabbed hold of it, and calmly explained that my friend was going to return soon and that I was saving this seat for him. I mistakenly believed that this was obviously reasonable — it was truthful, and as I made the assumption that this stranger simply didn't realise that the seat was my friend's, I was also respectful and understanding. But rather than responding with a polite, "Oh whoops, I'll find another chair," she *exploded*.

She violently yanked on the chair while screaming abuse at me. Every second word was a curse, and in fifteen seconds I received more insults than in the rest of my life combined. She could easily be heard over the music, and everyone within a five metre radius had stopped to watch. Then, she changed tack and started accusing me of touching her sexually, and called me a rapist. All of this while almost tearing my arm out of it's socket with her explosive tugs on the chair. I think she may have even slapped me a few times, though it all happened so fast I can't really recall.

I'll admit, there was a moment or two of doubt. Was it right to reserve the chair for my friend? Had I committed a grievous social

faux pas? Was holding onto a chair a form of sexual indecency? She seemed very sure that I was wrong, much more certain than I was about being right, and so I was briefly conflicted. However, once the violence started I quickly realised that I was dealing with a nutter.

Time and again something like this has happened to me. Someone will rant and rave about something I've expressed or done. They will be harsh and abusive. Yet, most often, when I look at their reactions objectively, I see no deductive reasoning, factual arguments, empirical evidence, or rational logic. It's always just the *noise* of someone whose insecurities were somehow provoked by my behaviour. And even when it makes sense, I still don't clearly see anything to be gained by responding to them. It's like when someone writes in to complain about a television show. Why did they keep watching it if it upset them? Probably because they wanted an excuse to gain attention through being outraged.

This woman was clearly upset and suffering from something mentally, at least for that night. Her reaction to my attempt to confront her on taking the chair was hugely disproportionate. I had mistakenly strayed into the orbit of someone who lacked the ability to handle conflict. Her reaction probably came from deep insecurities about control, entitlement and trauma. Perhaps her parents never let her sit at the dinner table. Or maybe they always said 'yes' to her and now she doesn't understand disagreement. Maybe she'd just been cheated on by some guy who looked a bit like me. *Who knows?!* The only thing for sure is that there was no point in trying to placate her or make her happy or make her like me. It was already over — she had escalated to hatred unreasonably quickly, and now all that was left for me to do was weather the storm until it passed.

In the end, my friend returned to the table around the same time her friends were gently trying to pull her away. I felt proud that I had taken abuse to protect my friend's seat — it seemed like the right thing to do. While there may be some debate on reserving chairs that belong to an absent person, her reaction did not allow for reasonable debate. It was an explosion of insecurity. It had nothing to do with me. To take it personally would have been a mistake — she was clearly unhappy *before* we ever had contact, so how could that be about *me*?

You will receive two different types of critical feedback or reactions: *rational arguments* against what you stand for — which we will further discuss shortly — and *insecure outbursts*; an individual or a group lashing out in fear and pain simply because their insecurities have been provoked. It is very important for you to recognise the difference because they will sometimes appear to be the same, but the second type has nothing to do with you, so trying to 'handle' it will be a waste of your time. Point them in the direction of professional support if you must, and then move on as best you can. Do not defend yourself against personal attacks because they aren't really personal attacks, they're just irrational outbursts.

Want an easy way to distinguish the difference? Just ask yourself: *"Is this how a confident person would react?"* Confident people may disagree with you, but they'll never abuse you, mock you, bully you, take vengeance on you, scream at you, or resort to violence. Confident people disagree calmly, rationally and respectfully. Their lack of insecurity ensures that they aren't driven to win, convince you, judge you, hurt you, or impress the audience. So if you're seeing any of these signs, you'll know that they are not coming from a place of self-confidence, and therefore their reaction isn't really about you. You might have set them off, but there was already something waiting to be set off before you showed up.

I like to think of a metaphor about flicking matches. If you flick a lit match into a block of ice, the flame just gets extinguished. The block of ice is completely unaffected. The only time a match will create an explosion is if you flick it into a box of fireworks. The match itself is ultimately harmless unless it meets with something flammable. People are like this. A confident person is a block of ice. No matter how much they disagree with you, they will never explode emotionally, especially if you're also calm and respectful. But someone who is insecure is like a box of fireworks. Even a tiny, reasonable confrontation can set them off, and their reaction will be hugely disproportionate to what has been said.

In other words, if someone treats you badly for being honest, *they're* the ones with issues, not you. Taking it personally will never make sense. Think of how much impact you can have on a person in comparison with everything else they've ever experienced in

their life. Let's say I confront someone for one minute. If they're thirty years old, that means I've affected them for approximately 0.00000015% of their entire life! How can I possibly consider that their reaction is something that I've created or am responsible for?

But What if They *Are* Making Sense?

Expressing yourself truthfully is not the same as being right, and sometimes people will react negatively in a way that can actually help you. If you can resist your tendency to panic and mistakenly link disagreement with hatred, you could learn a thing or two. Confrontation can come from people who love you and want the best for you, or at least are invested in accuracy. *Disagreement* does not mean *dislike*. But how are we to know if someone is challenging us in a helpful way with no hidden agenda? Basically, it's all about carefully assessing their motives.

When I released my first book, *The Legendary Life*, I started bugging my family and friends to post reviews on Amazon.com to support the promotion of the book. Naively, I expected nothing but glowing five-star reviews, though I did encourage them to be as honest as possible. At first, this is exactly what I received...

Enter Gareth, a friend of mine who I believe is almost incapable of a dishonest expression. He had no hesitation in giving me a three-star review, and his feedback was as brutal as it was accurately insightful. No punches pulled, he recognized me for what he believed were my strengths, and he tore apart what he believed were my weaknesses. (You can read his review to this day on Amazon.com.) At first, I felt the hot sickening flush of emotional pain, the one I get when I perceive a risk of hatred. But when I looked closer at my own reaction, I could clearly see that, firstly, Gareth had consistently been a loyal friend for as long as I'd known him, and secondly, he was making some good points. This was not an *attack*. I'd asked a friend for help, and he was giving it.

Gareth gave me some feedback that has served me well: ever since that, I double-check how I write. He also forced me to revisit my

views, specifically on the medical underpinnings of depression. I keep him in mind when I write, trying my best to always make it clear when my claims are based on anecdotal experience. I will write a first draft for myself, and then, with Gareth in mind, I'll go through and weed out the weaker points of the argument and provide citations or other evidence where I make factual claims. Gareth was the inspiration for hiring a careful editor to tear this book apart and keep me honest.

Gareth is a man I trust to have the motive of revealing the truth. He is not someone to make a point against someone else just to be contrarian. I have seen many examples of him agreeing fully with some people, half way with others (like me), and tearing apart people he completely disagrees with. There is a consistency in his approach to feedback, and most importantly, I have seen him change his views based on evidence that contradicted his beliefs. This is a man I can rely on for helpful, truthful feedback with healthy intentions.

When you feel guilty about someone's 'negative' reaction to your expression or action, you must first ask yourself about who they are and why they gave you the feedback in the first place. Did you ask for their reaction? What are their motives for dissent? What do they stand to gain from influencing you? How likely are they to have helpful intentions? Are they someone with a history of self-serving manipulation? You need to make sure that listening to their feedback is worthwhile before you digest it fully (and especially before you react to it with any form of behaviour).

Evidence is what you must use in order to identify the difference between helpful reactions and crazed outrage. When Gareth disproves my points, he can cite valid research and factual verification, and when he concedes to the viewpoints of others, he does so based on them having a greater preponderance or quality of evidence than he does. It is not based solely on how he feels, and there is no obvious gain for him in disproving me, beyond the satisfaction of stating his views. When others have a go at me, all too often, they provide little to no evidence in support of their claims. I'll see clear examples of blaming and personal attacks, and other warning signs that their unhappy reaction has really nothing to do with me.

When someone challenges you with evidence that threatens to question your truth, consider being grateful. Even haters can provide morsels of helpful feedback amongst the noise of their pain. Whenever I create a piece of content challenging the 'Red Pill' community, I always get a variety of both rational and outraged negative feedback. Sometimes, even the crazed and hateful responses are helpful — it either shows me that I've hit the mark (they're a community that's notorious for overreacting negatively to counter-evidence), or it validates my concerns that the community is largely an unhealthy influence on vulnerable psyches, or it even shows that my work was sloppy, judgmental, or factually wrong.

When someone challenges you, take it as an opportunity to re-examine your truth and to see if there is any new counter-evidence to consider. Someone being upset or offended, however, is *not* counter-evidence. If you find that haters have provided no evidence against your claims, dismiss them and continue on your way. Let them hate you.

You'll be OK.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY:

- No matter who it is that opposes you, respect for your integrity must come first. Without that, all will fail.
- You must set strict boundaries for those who actively sabotage you, but first you need to remind yourself of your values and why you're choosing to do this action.
- Feedback will be helpful — listen to it if it comes from a reliable source whom you know for sure has your best interests at heart.

KEY ACTIONS

- Make a list of everyone who has given you negative feedback in the recent past. Put a tick mark next to those who provided rational arguments and cited reliable evidence ("because I feel..." does not count as evidence). Notice how many of those people don't provide arguments; these are people it's safe to ignore or at least counter-challenge.

Apologising: Genuine vs Fake

"And stop saying 'sorry', it makes people hate you."

"Oh... I'm sorry."

From *The Hard Times of RJ Berger*, **comedy TV series**

Apologies: A Dark History

When you start being more confrontational and ruthless, the desire to apologise is very likely to arise as a knee-jerk reaction to seeing people respond negatively to what you say or do. But before you follow through on that 'sorry', let's first have another look at *why* you feel like saying it, since you completely undermine standing up for yourself when you apologise for doing it.

Experience has taught me that apologising often overlaps with dishonesty. By the end of this chapter, I hope to help you understand the difference between a helpful, truthful and genuine expression of apology and a disguised attempt to manipulate someone into feeling happy or thinking you're a better person than you are. All too often, people callously use an apology to influence others' emotions in order to protect their own reputation. In the process, they sacrifice their integrity to do so. Let's try to ensure that the next time you say "I'm sorry" you know why you're saying it and whether it aligns with your values.

For much of my life, one of the most common words in my daily lexicon was "sorry." I apologised for *everything*. Not only did I apologise for things I did wrong that perhaps might have caused harm, I also would apologise for bad weather, other people's behaviour, disagreeing, bumping into people accidentally, not enjoying something, enjoying something too much, talking, not

talking enough, liking and disliking things, and even for prompting someone else to apologise. I was basically saying sorry for having the gall to even exist.

Once I started to recognize this pattern of behaviour in myself and others, I noticed that people who don't like themselves much are far more likely to frequently apologise. It's as if people are apologizing for taking up space. Not only do people say words of apology, they also *behave* apologetically: they avoid opportunities so that others can take them, withdraw in order to avoid getting too much attention, or even simply hang their shoulders down in an almost permanently apologetic form of posture. So I've come to associate being sorry with a lack of confidence. While confident people do sometimes apologise, their apology doesn't come with that same flavour of, "I hate myself — I don't deserve to take up space" that so many others seem to have.

Overall, the main problem I have with apologies is that most of the time they are simply bullshit.

A Genuine Apology

A genuine apology must be able to convey regret or remorse for your behaviour without violating values such as honesty, responsibility, acceptance or respect. It must be a truthful representation of how you *really* feel, and it must be about something you chose to do which was under your control. To apologise without feeling any real remorse is an obvious lie, and to apologise for something you cannot control is to imply that you're more powerful than you are — also a lie. Giving a genuine apology must not be an attempt to control the feelings of others or another's view of you (e.g. pretending to feel remorse just so that people think that you're a good person), that is, if you wish to have integrity.

Below are some situations and examples from my life where offering an apology did not clash with the value of honesty, since I did not lie, minimize, or distort reality. On the contrary, while apologizing, I exposed the full truth:

When I took a risk and unintentionally hurt someone — like the time I waited too long to apply for my Czech visa and ended up getting kicked out of the country, which broke my girlfriend's heart while she was already suffering from depression. I felt terrible knowing her pain was a direct result of my procrastination. I honestly felt bad and the pain involved was a direct result of nothing more than my decisions.

When I knowingly betrayed my own values — like the time I deliberately got drunk enough to sleep with my friend's girlfriend. I knew it was wrong from start to finish, and I deliberately used alcohol to disinhibit my moral code so that I could experience instant gratification. I honestly felt guilty, and the pain involved was a direct result of my decision to breach my values. (By the way, I had to apologise to myself for this as well.)

When I was selfish and inconsiderate — like the time I rushed into dancing with someone at a dance event, and temporarily forgot that my girlfriend and I had an agreement to always have the first dance together. I regretted not taking more time to be patient and think things through. I honestly felt bad, and the pain Lucie felt was a direct result of my inconsiderate decision.

When I was careless or impulsive and caused harm — like the time I scraped a guy's BMW while parallel-parking because I got all stressed out about a queue forming behind me, so I rushed into the park instead of just having the courage to slow down and hold other people up. I honestly felt frustrated with myself, and the pain involved was a direct result of my decision to rush and people-please.

When I was inaccurate with critique and hypocritical — like the time I reviewed author Rollo Tomassi's '9 Iron Rules' on my YouTube channel without actually reading his book (I just used someone else's summary). I presented a *strawman* argument and undermined the principles he actually stood for. I honestly felt embarrassed for being a hypocrite (I hate when people are lazy and use biased arguments), and the pain involved was a direct result of my decision to cut corners.

A Fake Apology

A vast majority of the apologies I've witnessed, received, or delivered myself in the past, however, do not fit into the genuine apology principles described above, primarily because *most apologies are dishonest* (there are no genuine feelings of guilt, remorse or regret, or these feelings are confused with socially-conditioned guilt). At other times, apologies are not accurate, and therefore somewhat dishonest, because of our own ignorance or faulty reasoning (feeling sorry for something you had no control over). In short, a 'fake apology' is any expression of regret that is not genuine or is about something that is not your responsibility. Let me give you few examples:

An out-of-your-control accident — like coming around a blind corner and bumping into someone. Neither of you were doing anything more than just living your lives. It's inevitable that with seven billion-plus people walking the Earth you'll bump into people by accident, even if you're careful. A fun little, "Whoops, nice meeting you!" is a lot more shameless and confident than "Sorry." If you and another person have unconsciously created a situation where you accidentally conflict, just acknowledge it with a smile and move on.

Something you're not really sorry for — like how you deliberately ate the last of the ice cream, knowing full well your partner is going to blow her stack when she sits down to watch *Friends* without her treat. You knew what you were doing, you could predict the fallout, and you did it anyway, you little bastard. Don't now back down from your selfishness with a contrived guilt you don't really feel. Own that shit. My girl knows that if she wants chocolate, she needs to buy it and eat it with me, or I'm going to town on it by myself. It's an unapologetic winner-take-all in the Hunger Games at our house, and I'm from District 13.

Preferences and dislikes — like how I used to say sorry for hating tomatoes. I'd go to someone's house and they'd make me a sandwich with tomato in it — a sandwich I neither wanted nor asked for — and then they'd get upset when I picked out the devil's fruit to prevent myself from retching on their coffee table. You can't apologise for having a particular taste. If someone doesn't

like that I don't like it, fine. That's *their* preference. I can't tell you how many people have been upset by my dislike of tomatoes and I'm sitting there thinking, "Wait, that just means there are more for you, doesn't it?"

Something that has nothing to do with you — like apologising for bad weather. How many storms have you created in your life? None, in case you're wondering. Just for the record, you also don't control traffic accidents, politics and law, your family, physics, or the migration patterns of geese. Apologising for the effect that any of these things have on another person is basically claiming to be creator of the universe. Big claim, mate! Sympathise with their bad luck, if you feel compassionate, but don't take the blame for it.

Another person's feelings — like when someone feels offended by a joke you told. When you say sorry because of someone else's pain, you're implying that: a) what they're feeling is not helpful for them, and b) they can't handle it without you there to apologise. Instead of projecting your own emotional insecurities onto them, just support them through their pain with understanding and kindness. Let them feel whatever they need to feel. They might need this pain to strengthen their psyche, so don't cater to their weaknesses by claiming responsibility for their emotional reactions.

Another person's actions — like when you say sorry for your friend after he makes a fool of himself. Did you teach him to be a fool? Are you his Foolishness Coach? Do you control his actions through telepathy? No? Then why do you take blame for his choices? You're not guilty by association. Your baby is crying on the plane? Tough. If people don't like that, they shouldn't fly. Even when you vouch for someone, if they surprise you with unexpectedly poor behaviour, you're as much of a victim as anyone else. You're not the accomplice. Apologising for someone else's behaviour is hugely judgmental: you're saying that they are wrong to act this way. Who gave you the authority to make that call?

Someone else choosing to be harmed — like when someone is upset watching a movie you put on in your own house. Kindly show them the door instead of apologising. They're not being tied down and forced to watch. We live in an age where people like to do something Brene Brown calls 'pain shopping': deliberately seeking

out things that hurt their feelings and provoke their trauma. It's like that weird compulsion we have to push on our bruises. If someone can leave a painful situation, just tell them to leave. If they're offended by the comments in your Facebook group, boot them out. Don't be sorry for *their* decision to expose *themselves* to unpleasantness.

Beliefs, thoughts and feelings — like being apologetic about whom you voted for, or the philosophy you follow, or the anger you experience. While your behaviour and beliefs can be confronted, you can't be held accountable for the external influences that came into your life and influenced you to become this way. You do not choose your parents, or your upbringing, or any of the major factors that form the foundation of your mind — these are outside of your control. I can't expect a child raised in a pessimistic household to apologise for having a pessimistic viewpoint (but I can still challenge her beliefs). As long as your behaviour is honest and has integrity, your mind is not something to apologise for. You can change your beliefs according to new evidence that arises from being challenged and thank those involved for educating you, but be wary of apologising for unconscious ignorance because then you're apologising just for being a normal human. You can't be expected to know something you don't, or to believe in something you don't yet believe.

Doing what someone asked you to do (trying your best) — like when my wife has to bite her tongue and breathe deeply while I clean the bathroom 'my way'. She has a choice: either I help in a way that is different from hers, or I don't help. You can't delegate without accepting a difference of method, speed, enthusiasm and accuracy. If someone asks for your help and you did it the best way you could, and yet that's not enough for them, give them a list of people they can ask for assistance next time. I'm not saying you can't learn (yes, I now clean the bathroom 'her way'), just don't say "sorry" for putting in an honest effort when you could have just as easily left them hanging.

Taking up a reasonable amount of space — like when you refuse to take the last available seat in the bus just in case someone else might want it. Look, you were born. I know you didn't choose that. Maybe you'd take it back if you could, but it's done now. All matter

in the universe takes up space, and you are matter as well. You = matter. You matter. (The word 'matter' has now lost all meaning for me.) You have as much entitlement to live, speak, walk, sit, lie, drive, and work as any other clump of atoms that calls itself a person. Take up that space. Leave others to their space. Apologise for neither.

Being unable to mind-read or achieve any other kind of supernatural ability — like when you apologise for not guessing that your son's friend didn't want tomatoes in his sandwich, or that he didn't want a sandwich at all. You're just a human. You can only work with the brain and body you have, and the information available to you. To ask more of yourself is irrational. If someone is hurt by you, because of some interpretation in their mind that you could not have possibly known, no one is in the wrong, it's just a learning experience. Nothing to regret there.

Something you feel guilty for only because you got caught — like how masturbating to porn is all fine and dandy until your mother busts through the door. These types of situations are a little more nuanced and trickier because you will actually genuinely feel guilty and ashamed, but only because you were caught. Doing it alone was fine, you were cool with it. This means you have socially-conditioned guilt — you've been taught to feel bad about something but you don't really understand why because it doesn't conflict with your values. You don't buy it completely. It's important you don't say sorry here. You can express being embarrassed or ashamed, but just acknowledge that you were happy to do it anonymously.

Something naturally human that we all do at times — like crying, or over-eating, or feeling nervous, or laughing uncontrollably, or farting, or setting up your desk with OCD-level precision. Or anything else that is just your thing that you do, that same thing that plenty of humans do, and it's not intended to interfere with anyone else. It's just you being you. If others are offended by normal human behaviour, they're in for a rough ride living here on Earth. Don't coddle them, allow them to gradually desensitise themselves to humanity through exposure to you being *You*.

Existing — like when you say sorry for no real reason at all. Some of us have apologies just slip out like a Tourette's tic; a default

response to simply being alive in the presence of other people. If you're going to apologise, at least take a few seconds before you do to establish that you clearly know *why* you're doing it. What harm did you cause? What values did you breach? What do you feel and why do you feel that way? Is there evidence that calls for an expression of remorse or are you just on autopilot?

I Don't Do It

I rarely apologize, but it's not like I'm some thoughtless person who just bulldozes through people's lives without consideration for the influence I have. It's because I carefully assess situations before I apologise. I don't just automatically react with a 'sorry' every time someone shows a slight sign of being even a tiny bit unhappy, which is what I used to do.

I don't try to control people's emotions anymore. That change is what cut my apologies down to almost zero. I realised that most of my apologies came from a guilty feeling I had about not making others happy. Once I realised that other peoples' happiness — indeed, their entire emotional range — was actually none of my business, I found that it was rare to experience a situation where I could honestly say I had caused someone's emotions or pain to occur. Apologising almost always feels misguided and inaccurate, as long as I'm trying my best.

Also, and most importantly, because I focus on living by my values these days, I'm unlikely to cause harm inconsiderately or accidentally. If I hurt someone these days it's because I mean to do it, therefore an apology would not be genuine (e.g. making a client feel uncomfortable to help them change their limiting beliefs). Since I almost never hurt people unless I have the intention of improving their lives, I don't feel genuine remorse for their pain and therefore don't have any need to apologize. And I only cause harm when I'm convinced that the person needs me (and lets me) do it for their own benefit. Usually, they've asked me to do it, like when a coaching client demands that I give them critical feedback, or when someone has crossed my

boundaries and is not hearing my polite request for them to be more respectful.

I never expect or want an apology from others, either. In fact, this chapter is probably the one I most struggled to write, because I really don't see a need for apologies in a confident world. There are a couple of reasons for this.

Firstly, I don't believe in what most people call 'free will' — the belief that people make decisions somehow independently from their conditioning, culture, mood etc. Everyone is strongly influenced by their genetics, upbringing and present moment external factors outside of their control or choice. Someone saying "sorry" just sounds weird to me, because I know that either they intended to harm me or they didn't. Neither requires an apology. Just learn from it and grow as a person, or leave me alone if you insist on being harmful. I'll take that over an apology any day.

Secondly, I take responsibility for my own pain. No one can really hurt me, only my beliefs, reactions, interpretations and perceptions can hurt me; and no one but me is responsible for creating and developing those. If anything, the only apologies that make sense to me is when I apologise to myself for taking something personally that someone else said or did.

These days, if you take offence at my behaviour, I'm unlikely to say sorry, but I will listen to your grievances and talk them through with you. I will take your feedback seriously and sometimes even change the way I do things. I will try to learn from the experience, while also ensuring you have the opportunity to develop, too. I have found that the moments when we accidentally 'cause' each other pain are also great opportunities for growth, connection, and development, and if handled with honesty, curiosity and respect can lead to life getting better than it was before the pain.

Given that this approach consistently leads me, and others involved, to feel grateful that a painful incident has occurred between us — e.g. my wife and I feeling more connected after a disagreement — it seems somehow disrespectful to the beauty of the lesson to apologise for it happening. It doesn't make sense to say sorry for improving our lives and becoming wiser. I'd rather for someone

to piss me off and then for us to work through it to come out as better people, than it never happening or it being prematurely castrated by an apology. So basically, I don't feel right apologising when growth is available instead.

And I haven't noticed any major problems for myself or my clients with this approach thus far...

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- Most apologies are indirect manipulations of other people's emotions.
- For an apology to be honest, it must represent a genuine feeling of remorse or guilt, without the intent of changing how others view you.
- Never apologise for things outside of your control.
- A confident person never needs to receive an apology, because they take responsibility for their own feelings.

KEY ACTIONS

- Try going without apologising for an entire week, even when it feels genuine to do so. Instead, talk through conflicts with people, try to understand them, and come to agreements on changing behaviour. This can all be done without saying "sorry."

My Final Thoughts on Managing Reactions

"The final proof of greatness lies in being able to endure criticism without resentment."

Elbert Hubbard

Give Them a Chance to Surprise You

In the first book of this trilogy — *Nothing to Lose* — I often talked about taking the approach of "Let's just see what happens" whenever being directly honest, and trying to challenge your likely-to-be-bullshit assumption that you can accurately predict peoples' reactions. Yes, you may have some accurate predictions about people you know well, but even they can still surprise you. And they are more likely to surprise you if you stop *pre-judging* them. How is this possible, you may ask? Well, that question brings us to our next guiding point in being ruthlessly honest.

If you try to express yourself honestly but with the biased, stereotyping mindset of: "They are not going to like this," you *increase* the likelihood that they will react negatively. Your body language will provoke an aggressive or defensive reaction from them, regardless of your actual message. Your tone of voice, choice of words, and other factors will give them uncomfortable warning signs that trigger their defenses. If you are not open to the possibility of someone reacting in a rational or positive way, they will feel that judgment; like an inexplicable pressure to react defensively. If you're not OK with what you're about to say, they probably won't feel good either (we covered this in detail in the chapter about shame).

How do we achieve an open mind while delivering a truth if we already feel certain that it will trigger a meltdown? In simple terms, we *practice*. We take the risk of triggering negative reactions as often as we can, and try to open our minds up to being surprised by unexpectedly positive or at least helpful reactions. Instead of guessing at their reactions, you must experience them. Allow yourself to build up real-life evidence to replace your judgments, predictions and simulations. *Let people prove you wrong.* Sometimes you'll be right, but mostly you'll be at least a little bit wrong in your prediction. Eventually, through this experience, you'll see that most people are actually quite reasonable when they're presented with freely given honesty, especially if it does not include any hidden agendas and manipulation, and you'll also see that you can probably handle or ignore the ones who aren't reasonable.

"But What About When It's My Family?"

Unfortunately, for many of you, the most emotional and irrational resistance (i.e. people reacting as if they're being threatened when there's actually no danger) will come from those you love the most. I'm lucky. My family has nearly always been supportive of my truthful expression. Like all children, I initially assumed that my parents were the norm, but over the years I've come to learn that an encouraging home environment is tragically rare. Most others I speak to relate an entirely different experience to mine: one of heated arguments, criticising, dismissiveness, discouragement, unfair pressure, manipulation, narcissism, guilt-trips, revenge, passive-aggression, bullying, and plenty of shame. So, what do you do if the people closest to you are also the haters?

It's important to be aware and accepting of how easily influenced you are by these specific people. You might believe that your parents' or partner's opinions don't matter that much to you, but there's a good chance that deep-down they *really* do. From a young age, we seek our parents' love and approval, and their opinions will often influence us more than anyone else's. We can extend this

assumption to your closest friends, your siblings, your peers, and your partners.

I want to discourage you from mistakenly believing that you can just 'shrug it off' and easily move on after someone close to you reacts badly to your honesty. Their influence could completely derail your attempts to achieve integrity, in the long run, if you don't confront it as best as you can. I've seen people come to the realization that their life-long attempt to become 'independent' was founded in bitterness: it was more about rebelliously defying their parents than living by their own core values. (Frank Sinatra is quoted as saying, "The best form of revenge is massive success." I disagree. I believe that revenge is a needy form of motivation that will only steer you away from integrity in the long-run.)

Let's assume for now that we're on the same page around the idea that you are indeed strongly influenced by your loved ones. Let us move on to the more perplexing issue: how can we behave with integrity when we're unwilling to lose someone we love over it? For me, this has proven to be the biggest valued-living challenge I've ever encountered in my work as a coach.

Most of the time, when a coaching client of mine comes into social conflict because their integrity displeases someone else, I recommend that they do what they believe to be right, and sacrifice the relationship if need be. But, for many of my clients, their family and other loved ones cannot simply be cast aside so ruthlessly. There are a surprisingly large number of people who will consciously sacrifice who they are to keep their family happy, even when they know that people-pleasing is killing them on the inside or that their family is 'toxic'. Similar sacrifices can also be seen taking place in a person's church, workplace, and close-friend circle, but family seems to me to be the most consistently dominant force.

Just this morning I had a coaching session with a woman who is currently debating whether or not to divorce her husband. On one hand, she loves him, has a child with him, and can see positive changes that would mean that the relationship would be healthier this time around. On the other hand, her family would judge her and shun him completely (because he committed infidelity), which would mean that she couldn't spend as much quality time with

them. So she's forced to choose which family she gets to keep: the one she was born into, or the one she created? Either way, she loses.

How do we reconcile integrity with a lack of support from family and friends? If living with integrity means that we will lose favour with our loved ones and blood-relatives, should we still do it? I believe that the answer is *Yes*; however, I understand that you don't want to discard someone close to you just because they disagree with your beliefs or react poorly to your attempts to express yourself. So, to deal with these difficult cases, I've developed a technique of creating what I call an *acceptance invitation.*

The Acceptance Invitation

An acceptance invitation is giving someone you love the best possible opportunity to accept you as you are, while supporting them through it. They don't have to agree with you, they just have to accept you. You remove all pressure on them to agree with you or to change their own behaviour. You can even give them permission to continue actively disagreeing with you, but with one condition: *they are not allowed to deliberately sabotage or discourage you*. They can speak their minds, of course, but this must be restricted to discussing feelings. They are not allowed to express discouraging opinions, feedback, or advice that you did not ask for, or to actively get in your way.

To use a real-life example: a coach I trained, Mitch, posted a video of himself on Facebook going up to a stranger on the street and being honest about his feelings of attraction toward her. Most of his friends were supportive of this courageous act, both in going up to the girl and in posting it on the internet for everyone to see (and judge). His family, however, reacted quite differently. Mitch's mother and father panicked. They then discussed it extensively with other family members, all of whom are deeply religious and conservative, and they all agreed that the video was "a disgrace to the family." By the time they contacted Mitch, who was up until now unaware of any such discussions, they had gotten themselves

into a proper state of catastrophe. Mitch's father even said, "Approaching strangers on the street will get you killed!"

Mitch's more conservative friends also reached out with facetious concern. They asked him if he was feeling OK, and eventually led the conversation toward suggesting that he needs to get back to Church and reconnect with Jesus. These friends simply could not comprehend that what he was doing was helpful for him and for others: he was building his confidence and he was being a role model of shamelessness (and social skills) for others. His friends and family did not stop even for a second to consider whether their feedback was wanted or helpful. To them, he was a "sinner," or crazy, or depressed, or possibly all of the above. They did not accept him, instead they judged him as 'needing' their guidance and tried to force-feed him their unsolicited help.

The first thing Mitch did was check in with himself, to see if he did the right thing according to his own values. This first step is critical. Mitch knew he would be strongly influenced by his family, and so he needed to slow down and first ensure that he was on track with integrity before he addressed their resistance. When people resist your integrity, you will feel an internal pressure to respond *quickly* and *convincingly*, to provide undeniable proof of being 'right'. But you don't need to respond right away, you don't have to rush. Stop and go *zero*, and then tell them to give you space so you can process their reaction. Take time out to check back in with your values.

Mitch also made sure to talk to other guys at BROJO, a community that is supportive of integrity and honesty, to see if their perspectives verified that he was living with integrity. These were guys he could trust to give him *helpful* feedback. When you receive critical feedback that you didn't request, especially from an unreliable or judgmental source, it's important to check in with other sources of feedback that you know are reliable, rational, and likely to give you an unbiased perspective. This allowed Mitch one final check-in before he asserted himself.

Then Mitch responded, with love and kindness, to the family members who were upset. He let them voice their concerns and express their grievances with his behaviour. He made a considerable

effort *not* to defend himself (this is important — it demonstrates and creates self-acceptance). He reassured them that his intention was never to betray the family, and he explained that he did this for his own development. Note, there is a big difference between explaining a situation and trying to justify your behaviour.

Mitch then did something he later considered to be an error: he justified himself on social media. Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with this, but doing so validated his opponents' claims. He was confirming that there was something that *needed* justifying, even though he just wanted to provide context for the family members who were feeling hurt. Once you start defending yourself through justification, all is lost. Their views were validated by this apparent need for justification, so given their already conservative and close-minded perspective, there would now be little chance of them ever changing their stance. However, that was never likely to happen anyway. You'll discover that when your family or other loved ones are stuck in their ways, trying to change their minds is a waste of effort. You're better off putting that energy toward coming to a respectful agreement about acceptance and boundaries.

In the end, Mitch decided to double-down on his self-acceptance, and turned off all his privacy settings on Facebook: not only could his family see what he was up to, but so could the rest of the world. He made an *acceptance invitation* to his family: they could disagree but not judge or force their views on him. If they broke this agreement, the consequence would simply be less contact with Mitch. It's *their* choice. He came to accept that people would be disconnecting from him on social media if the content he posted upset them. Mitch advised his family that he was on a path of self-discovery, and that if they were upset by this they could simply stop watching.

KEEPING IT SIMPLY SUMMARY

- Consider hiring a coach or other paid mentor, or join a trustworthy community for feedback you can rely on (e.g. www.brojo.org).
- In general, I recommend cutting people out of your life if they try to interfere with your integrity, but if you're unwilling to do this you must at least set boundaries so that they can choose to either respect or disrespect you (with basic rewards and consequences).
- An *acceptance invitation* is about agreeing to disagree, but with boundaries that require the other person to behave respectfully toward you.
- If a loved one has been given a compassionate, patient chance to respect you and yet still fails to do so, you may have to reconsider your stance on keeping them in your life. Otherwise, your only remaining option is to sacrifice your integrity. The choice is yours.

KEY ACTIONS

- If there is someone in your life with whom you continuously sacrifice your integrity, try making an acceptance agreement with them: ask them to accept you as you are and in exchange you won't try to change them either.

Lewinsky vs Hilton: A Lesson in Shameless Honesty

"And I felt sorry, and I have felt bad about what happened."

Monica Lewinsky

"I wish I had never met him. That is actually the one regret in my life. I wish that I had never met that guy. I could not leave my house for months. I was so depressed, humiliated."

Paris Hilton

A Tale of Two Women

I'd like to wrap this book up with something perhaps a little unexpected: a tale of two women who experienced very similar tragedies, yet one was destroyed for decades while the other flourished. Both women had their honesty and shamelessness tested, and each reacted differently to that test. We will now use their examples to explore how shameless honesty can make the difference between success and failure in life.

The Cigar in The Oval Office

In 1998, a significant scandal took place, forever changing how the general population reacts to the release of secrets about high-profile people. A couple of years earlier, Monica Lewinsky, a fresh-faced young intern for the White House, had been carrying on a sexual affair with then-president Bill Clinton. In '98, a confidant

tipped off the media, and all hell broke loose as the affair was revealed to the public in sordid detail.

Lewinsky became a central figure for global derision, ridicule, and even outright hatred. As she put it during a TED talk she released in 2015, her first major public appearance since becoming a recluse in reaction to the scandal: "I became Patient Zero for internet-shaming." And she's not wrong. Lewinsky was the first person *ever* to be *globally* attacked by the earliest version of internet trolls. Her shameful secret went publicly viral, world-wide, in a matter of *seconds*. Many public figures had been scorned in the past, but never before with the amplified reach of the world wide web.

For many of us, this is our greatest fear: to be suddenly abandoned by *everyone*, to be hated by all. This is probably why we tend to fear public speaking: the risk of being disliked by a room full of people all at once seems so much more severe and uncontrollable than losing the approval of a single person during a one-to-one conversation. Just imagine it: one morning, Lewinsky woke up to discover that the entire population of Earth now apparently hated her, personally and forcefully. Yes, there would have been some exceptions, like her family, perhaps, and a handful of supportive voices here and there, but you can imagine how these would have been obliterated by the rest of the world yelling, "Shame!"

In Lewinsky's TED talk, she reveals how she went into reclusion after this event, and essentially disappeared from public view for a full twenty years. *Two decades of hiding*. Take a moment to just imagine that. If the average age for a female is about eighty years, that's a *quarter* of her life. This woman's future, a potentially prosperous one at that, was destroyed overnight by a few heated moments of spontaneous sexual intimacy. Having an affair ruined her life.

Or so it would seem...

As brutal as I might sound, and perhaps contrary to where you might think I'm going with this, I don't buy into Lewinsky's claim that the world destroyed her with hate. I don't believe that her being shamed by the internet population was what brought her down. While I have no doubt that waking up to find yourself staring down the barrel of global outrage is unbearably intimidating, I believe

that the ultimate responsibility for the pain she experienced *lies within herself*. I know I sound like a heartless bastard, but just hear me out as I compare Lewinsky's scandal to another more recent one, of a similar nature and scale...

One Night in Paris

You might think that the whole world finding out that you administered oral sex to a famous, married politician is the height of embarrassment, but just imagine if someone then circulated a *video* of it! It's one thing to hear something spoken about, but to see it happen in stark clarity: a fully-lit home video, showing you completely naked and engaged in numerous intimately pornographic sexual acts for a prolonged period... well, you can only imagine your devastation. Imagine every secret you keep being betrayed and shown to the world. *That's* what happened to Paris Hilton. The heiress of one of the world's biggest hotel chains, can be viewed on the internet, even to this day, being sexually penetrated in explicit detail, and there's nothing she can do to stop it.

If you were forced to choose one of these two scandals to happen to you, which one would you go for? I imagine most of you would opt for Lewinsky's mishap — at least your parents wouldn't end up seeing you going at it with your ex-boyfriend. At least Lewinsky's lover ruled over the free world, whereas Hilton was betrayed by a nameless, sycophantic attention-seeker. Given the raw facts of the case, you could be forgiven for assuming that Hilton was more harmed by this scandal than Lewinsky was by hers. But that isn't what happened.

After the release of her sex-tape, Hilton reportedly experienced a brief depression where she didn't want to leave the house (a few weeks at most), but then she promptly *took off*, going from strength to strength as she developed her brand and business. Suddenly, she was the star of every other reality and talk-show, sponsoring her own line of highly popular perfumes and eventually becoming a mediocre yet hugely successful DJ. An observer could only conclude that Hilton greatly benefitted from her sex-tape scandal, and

conspiracy theorists would be justified in speculating that perhaps she released the tape herself in a demonstration of Nostradamos-level premonition (she vehemently denies such claims).

How is this possible? How can one young woman *thrive* from having a graphic sex-tape released for the entire world to see (including every one of her close friends and relatives), while another woman gets *obliterated* for twenty years by simple verbal confirmation of fairly vanilla sexual activity? They were arguably equal in public profile. In fact, Hilton's name was far more well-known than Lewinsky's before her scandal broke. The scandals themselves just don't seem comparable in terms of the information that was released versus the harm that they experienced. It doesn't make sense that Lewinksy ended up worse off than Hilton. Sure, Lewinsky wasn't used to attention like Hilton must have been, but still; a graphic sex-tape vs a verbally-confirmed episode of extra-marital play?

This difference in harm starts to become clearer, however, when we focus away from the details of the cases and observe the actual reactions of these two women. Specifically, when we start to observe their *shame*.

Shame Decides the Consequences

Paris Hilton is about as shameless as a human can get. I'm barely aware of her and yet still feel absolutely certain of her shamelessness — that's how prolific she is. No matter what she does, or how she's perceived, or the reactions of the public, Paris just keeps on being *Paris* without apology. Despite how you might feel about her (I'm not a fan myself), only a fool would lack respect for the sheer shamelessness of which she is capable. She effortlessly turned a sex-tape into massive success, something all the socialites seem to be attempting to mimic now. I'm sure you or I would be destroyed by a similar event, yet she thrived.

Harsh as I may be, I believe the primary factor determining Lewinsky's pain was her shame about her own behaviour. Brash as

she is, Hilton's reaction to the release of her sex-tape was basically: *The guy who released the tape is an asshole.* Hilton never apologised for what took place on the sex-tape. Lewinsky, on the other hand, was immediately remorseful, apologetic, and filled with deep regret about her behaviour. Lewinsky was almost certainly ashamed of her sexual activity *before* the world became aware of it, evidenced by the fact that she never willingly shared or released the information earlier. This shame was likely compounded by Bill Clinton's ongoing denials, but it was obviously there before he ever did the whole, "I have never had relations with that woman" bit.

We only dishonestly hide what we think should be hidden, obviously, and this is the process for creating shame, which then provokes further dishonesty to protect the secret. Hilton may not have voluntarily released any sex-tapes before this incident, but she certainly wasn't known for hiding her sexuality, and many pre-scandal sources of evidence can be seen of Hilton unashamedly admitting to devious sexual activity as well as revealing her body for the public to see. She now has a massive social following; a legion of fans who rush to defend her honour religiously, no matter how wild she gets or the plethora of evidence that she is unapologetically flirtatious and promiscuous.

Imagine, for a bizarre moment, if Lewinsky had Hilton's shamelessness. How might she have reacted differently to the breaking news of her affair? What would Paris have done differently? It's unlikely that there would have been an apology. Most probably, there would have been a series of talk-show interviews and other high-paying media appearances, followed by a reality show called "Inside Monica" and perhaps even a career as a crappy DJ. Hilton would have placed the blame squarely on the President's shoulders rather than burdening herself with it. And I'm not saying this is the ideal response, I'm simply inviting you to conduct a mental experiment of reacting to a scandal shamelessly, and to consider the different results this could generate.

Putting it bluntly, I believe Lewinsky's biggest mistake was missing the opportunity to be honest and claim responsibility for her behaviour *before* someone narked on her, or at least shortly after it was revealed. Instead of apologizing, she could have told the world that yes, she was attracted to the most powerful man in the

world and wanted a piece of him (who wouldn't?), and while she broke her own values about being with a married man, she could challenge the hypocrites in their glass-houses to prove that they'd be able to resist the temptation. Clinton was and still is a known manipulative liar, with close ties to many dubious characters (like Jeffrey Epstein), who abused his power over Lewinsky while in the role of President of the USA!

Marilyn Monroe certainly had her fill of married presidents, yet these days it's almost impossible to scroll through social media without seeing her being misquoted by adoring fans. I know I'd have supported Lewinsky if she'd just *owned* it. And I know many women who would've said, "You go girl, serve those haters with some truth!"

You do not owe the world an apology for being human. It doesn't mean you can do whatever harmful shit you want, but it does mean that you're the only one responsible for those decisions and actions, and it's none of anyone's business how you deal with it. If you breach your values, welcome to being human! At least take full honest responsibility for it. There could have been millions of people in the crowd who didn't really know how they felt about Lewinsky's actions. They would have been waiting to see her reaction before deciding. They were on the fence, and then her shame confirmed their suspicions that she'd done something 'wrong', so they tipped over into disgust instead of respect.

Yes, millions of people go on the internet every day, still, to call Paris Hilton a slut and a whore. Yet she continues to thrive (or so it seems from an outside perspective at least) and couldn't be further from being a recluse. She has somehow miraculously thrived from an event that would destroy most. Not because she's stronger or smarter, but simply because she's not ashamed of who she is. We could, and should, learn from this.

Honesty is the path to shamelessness, and shamelessness is the core ingredient of self-confidence. If you want to become someone who's confident to the point that you could survive the release of a sex-tape or any other vulnerable secrets and actually thrive from such an event, *then you need to become so honest that no one can shame you*. You need to own who you are, in all it's beauty and

ugliness, and the way to do this is to be so ridiculously, shamelessly, ruthlessly honest that no one ever has a chance to embarass you. Reveal your secrets, make fun of your flaws, embarrass yourself, bathe in awkwardness, and call out your deepest desires and preferences, rather than waiting for someone else to do it for you (or hoping it never happens).

Get it all out there, and no one will ever be able to harm you with it.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE SUMMARY

- If you don't own what you are and what you do, others will decide for you if you're good or bad.
- Apologizing for mistakes only confirms to others that you are 'wrong'. You can admit that you breached your values without tolerating the judgment of others.
- Everyone else has done nasty things too, they hide behind their judgments of you to avoid being caught.
- Honesty wins the day — the person with the strongest frame, or interpretation of reality, owns reality.

KEY ACTIONS

- Choose one thing you're deeply ashamed of and admit it to someone who you know will judge you for it. Repeat this exercise every week for the rest of your life until there's nothing left to hide.

Postface

The Final Word

Thank you for being on this journey with me

To speak honestly and live with integrity is difficult, to say the least. You will never achieve a total state of one hundred percent pure integrity, and so that should not be the aim. It is *the pursuit of integrity* that matters the most. We are all flawed humans, too psychologically complicated to achieve any level of purity or complete certainty. But we are blessed with some control over our behaviour and with an agency that gives us the ability to be as honest as we can be, however inaccurate that may be at times. Our duty is to make the most of the limited influence we have.

Although I go on about being completely honest and having integrity throughout this book, I know that both you and I will always struggle to achieve both honesty and integrity. Every day I face barriers to honesty, and while I am so much more truthful nowadays than I ever was in the past, I still screw it up sometimes. There are still times where I pause because I'm not sure what it means to be honest in a particular situation. There are still times where my mind convinces me to hold back the truth and I lack the courage or awareness to intervene. There are times where I exaggerate or add fictional details to a story to spice it up and be more entertaining. There are even still very occasional instances when I knowingly lie.

I have given up on the idea that I can achieve pure honesty. Instead, I focus on simply doing my best: to be a little more honest than I was in the past, to redeem myself for any lies I told yesterday. I try to reveal the important things that make a difference to how people connect with me. I figure that as long as I get the most vulnerable and emotional truths out there, I can counteract any harm caused by minor fictions.

The best we can really hope for is to push ourselves away from the deception that most people are ruled by. We live in a globally connected community, and we're *surrounded* by actively dishonest people. There's a distinct lack of living by ethical values. We are lied to daily by marketers, politicians, news media, religions, and even by our friends, workmates, and family. To stand up against this tidal wave of deceit — to speak the truth and to act according to your values despite such resistance — takes tremendous courage. Sometimes it will feel like you're the only one doing it, because in too many situations you *will* be the only one doing it!

Sometimes the level of bullshit in the world depresses me. It seems like almost everyone has agreed to cheat and manipulate each other in an endless game of insecurity, greed, scarcity, neediness, and revenge. In my darkest moments, I wonder if I'm wrong about the whole integrity thing, and I think that maybe humans are destined to be weak, pathetic, self-destructive liars. It sometimes seems that people have made a commitment to destructive dishonesty and that they will not reconsider their stance despite receiving and causing suffering throughout their entire lives.

But every once in a while, I come across someone who *effortlessly* lives by the principles described in this book, as if integrity comes as easily and naturally to them as breathing. In a dark world of lies, people like this are *the light*. You can feel it in their presence. They are a breath of fresh air, an oasis of trustworthiness, transparency and candour that puts everyone else to shame. I can't always tell when someone is lying to me, but I know for certain when I'm in the presence of a deeply honest and shameless person. When I meet these people, my faith in honesty and humanity is instantly restored. Any doubts I had about advocating for truthfulness dissolve in their presence.

These rare people, the 'naturally' honest ones, are luckier than they'll ever know. By some stroke of fate, they weren't conditioned to become insecure bullshit-artists like the rest of us. They were never coerced or manipulated into choosing deception, or else they were somehow able to resist that education and think for themselves, and because of that they've established a wealth of undeniable evidence throughout their lives that honesty really is

the best policy. Being honest just makes sense to them. I've only met a few of them in my life. They are my heroes.

For the rest of us — people like you and me who must read books to learn what honesty even is — we can only admire and model them because we are *tainted*. People like you and me must heal ourselves, slowly, methodically, and sometimes painfully. The only reason it hurts for us to be honest is because we're not used to it. Your first ever workout in a gym, after a lifetime spent wallowing on the sofa watching *Friends* reruns, leaves your body paralysed with aching muscles and fatigue. Meanwhile, the natural athlete is empowered by their workout: a completely opposite effect. One day, you too will find honesty as simple and rewarding, but there is a pain-period you must first go through. Your integrity muscles have atrophied with misuse and neglect, so doing honesty exercises is going to leave you feeling sore, at first.

Like me, you might have spent nearly your entire life being fake, so suddenly becoming real is like waking up from a coma. You're essentially starting all over again, and it might feel overwhelming. When I'm in doubt about telling the truth or doing what I believe is right, I remind myself of the long-term suffering I've experienced and have seen in others as a direct result of my untruthfulness. I remember the disconnected loneliness that comes from hiding who I am. I remember the hot, panicky feeling I get when I'm caught out in a lie, and the disappointment on the other person's face when they realise that I betrayed them and cannot be trusted. I remember the constant anxiety. I remember the missed opportunities caused by the avoidance of fear sensations, and from believing my bullshit predictions of the future. I remember a lifetime of regret, isolation, confusion and self-loathing.

Things are different for me these days.

That performance I used to call 'myself' no longer exists. He's just a memory. Sometimes I struggle to believe that he ever existed, as the idea of living dishonestly seems so *alien* to me these days. But then I notice how life has changed for me. Things I used to be deeply ashamed of are now just normal topics of conversation. I rarely have a conversation that isn't deep or at least meaningful. I'm married to a woman I love unconditionally, and I never have

to hide *anything* from her. I used to hate going to work. Now, I'd happily coach people for free, it really is that satisfying. My body and mind are healthier than I'd ever believed possible. I connect easily with my fellow humans, as if we'd been friends all along, and when someone doesn't like me I genuinely have almost no emotional reaction, I just move on. I travel the world on my own time, exploring this wonderful thing called life, all the while facing my hassles, insecurities and upsets with resourcefulness, transparency and humanity... well, most of the time. I could never go back to my old performance now — there's just so much goodness to be experienced in an honest life.

I've developed a mantra that I've found to be extremely helpful to live by: *when in doubt, just be more honest*.

To this day, I have not encountered a single problem that cannot be solved by more honesty. Of course, the resolution of these problems is not instantaneous. It often gets worse before it gets better, like how a conflict immediately escalates when you first confront someone — the "but it hurts" illusion is what convinces us to be dishonest in the first place. However, this pain only occurs because some form of dishonesty created the original problem in the first place, and either way, in the longer term, honesty wins out in the end. The pain will not last.

The fact that you'd even read a book like this earns you my respect and admiration. In a world where you are bombarded by messages insisting that you be manipulative, strategic, and untruthful, for you to pick up a book like this one means you're standing up for yourself and swimming against the tide. To even admit to yourself that you are dishonest is really the biggest hurdle of them all, because it means looking in the mirror and making the only apology that I would fully endorse: say sorry to *yourself* for lying and for hiding who you are for all these years.

We shouldn't blame ourselves for being so hidden and deceptive; we were trained to do it from birth. But now that you're aware of your dishonesty, the responsibility for change, as always, rests upon you. Becoming a person of integrity won't be smooth or easy, and it may mean sacrificing some of the long-established patterns, relationships, and comforts you've created through

cowardly, dishonest or inaccurate means. You'll need to knock down your house of lies and rebuild it from a new foundation of truthfulness. I have empathy for you because I've been through this uncomfortable transformation myself, but I don't pity you. While it did hurt like hell to lose friends, change my career, and destroy my identity and my old way of life (through simply expressing myself honestly), it was also the most rewarding mission I've ever undertaken. I don't feel sorry for you because I know that the pain is worth it.

Now that I've transformed myself, my new mission is to educate and inspire others to experiment with shameless honesty. Knowing that you are reading this book provides me with immense joy, and I'm so grateful for the opportunity to assist you. Reach out to me personally if you need any further guidance. Until I take my last breath, I'm sure that I will be trying to help people like you figure out what it means to be... well, *You.*

Thank you so much for reading.

With love,

Dan Munro

dan@brojo.org

Recognition

This book was a mess until I opened up and allowed master editor Vedrana Cetina to tear it to pieces and put it back together. She ensured that it flowed, made sense, stuck to the point, and didn't make too many unscientific claims. If this book makes sense from start to finish, it's because of her. It was merely a pool of steaming idea-vomit before she worked it over.

My wife Lucie is the single greatest inspiration and role-model in my life for being honest. Not only does she encourage and support me to speak my mind (the level of freedom I have to express myself should be the envy of every husband alive), she shows me how it's done and often puts me to shame with how much more direct she is than me. Our marriage is rock-solid because of our combined dedication to being truthful with each other. Baby, you're still my favourite person.

Over the last few years I've slowly become aware of how incredibly lucky I am to have Ros and Tim, the loving and supportive parents that I was blessed with. I have the courage to put my ideas out there, and do what I believe is right even when others disagree, because they raised me to follow my passions instead of fit in with the crowd. Their support, combined with the love I receive unconditionally from my aunties, uncles and cousins gives me a significant advantage in securing a confident and enjoyable life. I know how lucky I am now.

Two of the most straight up and honest motherfuckers I've ever known are my younger brothers Matt and Oliver (a.k.a. Rev, Chad etc.). "Shameless" barely begins to describe them. You never have to guess what they're thinking, and like me they do what they want with their lives, and to hell with anyone who bitches about it. What I had to learn through books they figured out on their own.

Being honest has changed my social life radically. I want to especially recognise the friends who managed to survive my transformation, probably because those small few were the only

ones I felt comfortable being honest with back in my Nice Guy days. Zane, Brad, Andrew, Anthony, Heidi, Luke, Charlyn, Ari - thanks for sticking around and putting up with my shit. And I am surprised to have developed so many new friendships in my adult years, from my dance buddies and fellow coaches/podcasters, to clients and BROJO members from around the world.

Huge props have to go to Mike Wells, my partner-in-crime who was instrumental in making BROJO real. You and I have spent literally hundreds of hours discussing and dissecting honesty, integrity and confidence, and our discussions were the platform for many of the core concepts in this book. You'll be able to see your influence in every chapter. To you readers, if you don't get coaching with me, then get it with Mike instead! Send him a dick-pic to get things started: mike@brojo.org

BROJO members: this community makes me feel like I've done something truly meaningful with my life. For a long time, I thought very few people were truly interested in living with integrity or being boldly honest. You guys and gals proved me wrong on that one. As someone who firmly believes that the world of humans can only be repaired by a dramatic increase in the integrity of each individual, you all give me hope that it's actually possible and not just a pipe-dream.

You might notice other people's ideas in this book. That's because above all else I'm an avid reader and listener, and my ideas on honesty have been honed, moderated and inspired by many great people. There are too many to name and remember here, but I'd like to single out some of my favourite and most respected practitioners of honesty and integrity:

Brad Blanton (*Radical Honesty*) for showing me how far honesty can go. Mark Manson (*The Subtle Art of Not Giving a Fuck* and *Models*) for role-modelling shameless authenticity in the bullshit-heavy industry of self-development. Sam Harris (*Lying*) for your ruthless loyalty to the truth and reason. Christopher Hitchens (may you rest in peace), for modelling what fearless honesty looks like. Jim Carrey for your ability to vulnerably reveal the secret within despite knowing the risk to your career. Louis CK, for bouncing back without hiding a thing. Brene Brown for your work on shame. Ricky Gervais for making

honesty fun. Neil Strauss for sharing your journey from seduction to integrity. Joe Rogan for prioritising honesty over popularity... and becoming extremely popular as a result. Jordan Peterson - we may not agree on everything but you might possibly be the most honest speaker I've ever witnessed. Nelson Mandela (rest in peace), for choosing integrity over freedom and showing us all how life should be lived.

And while there aren't really specific individuals (who are alive today) to thank for these philosophies, I must give special mention to Stoicism, Essentialism, and Minimalism. These three, more than any other, have shaped my views on what it means to live with integrity and confidence.

Finally, to *you*, the reader, who for some reason has nothing better to do than read the acknowledgment chapter of this book. You have no idea how honoured and touched I am to know that you took time out of your life to consider my views and perhaps even act on them. You have given as much to me through reading this book as I could have hoped to give you by writing it. We're a team.

Thank you.